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The House of Hidden Treasure

Maxwell Gray



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The House of Hidden Treasure

A Novel

By

Maxwell Gray

Author of
'The Silence of Dean Maitland,' 'The Last Sentence'
'In the Heart of the Storm,' etc. etc.

'*C'est ainsi que Dieu forge une âme.*'
MANUEL.

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THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN TREASURE

PROLOGUE

A.D. 186-

CHAPTER I

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of the perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart.'—*Macbeth.*

THIS house of many memories was of uncertain but assured antiquity, standing, it was conjectured, on the site of a much larger building, or series of buildings, some portions of which had entirely vanished, while others had been rebuilt or added at different epochs; some dated from the thirteenth century, the latest additions were Jacobean. Yet it was not large; what survived after so many vicissitudes might indeed be called a house of remnants. It had been burnt more than once by the French, besieged more than once, had sheltered Cavaliers in a Roundhead siege, and been a refuge for White or Red Rose. Tradition gave it a secret sliding panel; but, if the panel remained, the secret of the spring was lost. Ghosts it possessed in abundance, according to Barling folk, who unanimously decided to avoid it after dark.

Being to let in the days of the former Lord Wotton, that is, in the thirties, it remained untenanted for years, owing to this ghostly repute; it might, but for the advent of the Dorriens, have so remained until this very day—this very enlightened, hypercivilised day at the close of the century, a day so perfectly informed, so thoroughly schooled, as to have lost faith in virtue, honour, and truth; in decency, authority, and government; so surfeited with fairy tales of science, and rich in the long result of time, as to believe in nothing—save only steam, bacteria, natural selection, natural appetites, money, and ghosts. Especially in that depraved and demoralised class of ghost which, on parting with its body, parts also with its grammar, self-respect, and dignity, and conveys vulgar and foolish observations to ghosts still clothed

with flesh and the decencies of life, by knocking furniture about. Needless to say that the house beneath the down harboured none but the best class of ghosts, the ancient, orthodox, aristocratic spirits, composed of shadow or moonlight, clothed in armour or brocade, and occupied only in the most dismal and dignified pursuits—weeping, wailing, wringing of hands, clanking of armour and fetters. These, while scorning the seclusion and shadows of table-covers and human legs, are still afraid of cock-crow and the first streak of dawn, like fairies and goblins. This old-established ghost, though guilty of such solecisms as carrying the head under the arm, and of the discourtesy of entering people's bed-chambers uninvited at night, is never ungrammatical, much less vulgar.

If all spirits were permitted and inclined to revisit those glimpses of the moon beneath which their brief earthly parts were enacted, the house would indeed have been populous in ghosts. Whether those of the Rose factions would care to see the York and Lancaster roses blooming in the sweet-old garden is doubtful; how the different centuries would mix, problematical. Puritan and Anglican, Lollard and Independent, monk and Whitefieldite, recluse and deaconess, nun and Biblewoman, cardinal and elder, how would these harmonise? Would the mailed thirteenth century knight understand the speech or thoughts—or their absence—of his descendant, the guardsman of to-day?

A house of many memories must be haunted, a house so ancient must echo with long-stilled laughter and long-hushed weeping, forgotten benisons and extinct execrations; a house thus overpowered with the fulness of past life permits no full, strenuous life of to-day. Aged, outspent lives, weary and broken ones, may take refuge in it, and there rest a while before the long rest of the grave; a house of remnants, it may harbour remnants of human life; a house of memories, it may shelter those whose lives are only memories. A fit home for a student or a dreamer, such a house is out of harmony with youth, hope, and joy; seeing what life is in its essence, at the highest heart-throb, a house so palpitating with the past might fitly be styled a house of forgotten dreams. And a pleasanter, fitter place to dream in could scarcely be found.

Whether because of the partial ruin of the house, whether because they had outgrown it, or because the ancient town had surged up in plebeian insolence, and too closely approached its patrician seclusion, the Garennes had long since built themselves another, statelier home some seven miles away beyond the down-ridge, in the umbrage and beauty of oak and beech and music-

murmuring pine. New Court this was at first called, later Newcourt Place; thus the former home became the Old House, and thus it was styled by Barling folk generally. Into the Old House, widows, old maidens, younger sons, and family failures had crept from time to time at pleasure of the head of the family. None of these family offshoots remaining in the days of the former Lord Wotton, the third earl, he let the old house at Barling, whereupon the insulted patrician ghosts asserted themselves with such vigour on finding their abode hired out to strangers, that they were permitted the entire use of it for many years.

For Maurice Bertram it had no terrors, no associations, no memories that were not entirely delightful. Full of romance and poetry, it was to him an embodied fairy tale. Sweet and subtle fragrance pervaded it in his memory, faint odours of lavender and dried roses. There is no fragrance to match that of old roses; the fragrance of their bloom is coarse by comparison with that subtle, spiritual, pathetic scent. All the happiness his orphan childhood had known was associated with that house; he had dreamed of it by day and by night, longed for it, pictured it, until, when he stood a grown man before its heavy doorway and regarded its steep, low-browed roof and leaning gable-end, he scarcely knew it again; yet it was unchanged.

His cousins, the rector's sturdy sons, had taken care to instruct him in the ghostliness of its inmates. To do them justice, though they invented a good half of what they told him, not one of them would have passed it alone after dark. It fascinated him, while his blood froze at the stories of its ghosts.

Coming off the down into drowsy old Barling, a tiny borough that fell asleep a hundred years ago, and seldom even turned in the slumber of its grass-grown street, a chalky lane led past the south front of the Old House, which stood well back in a sunny walled garden, looking placidly up the vale beneath a down, and across grassy marshes to the sea. A high iron gate, never opened, and rusting on its briar-grown hinges, permitted a glimpse of the south front up a broad grass walk, bordered with flowers and espalier fruit-trees, to the door, over the porch of which was a sundial of rare and beautiful iron-work. The front was timbered, the first story overhung the ground floor, and was supported on wooden pillars, clasped by roses and creepers.

On one far-off summer forenoon, Bertram, then a child of seven, was peeping through the iron gate with fascinated gaze, his two small brown fists grasping the rusty bars, his great blue eyes wide with desire to enter the charmed forbidden precincts

of the tangled garden, when a skilful and well-directed kick from his eldest cousin Stanley, a public schoolboy of fifteen, who had undertaken to 'make a man' of Maurice, dissipated the child's dreams of magicians, enchantments, and dragon-guarded treasure, and made him limp quickly, with quivering lip and choked-back whimper, round the corner of the walled garden and into the quiet street. Here garden-wall and house-wall joined and stood flush with the pavement, beneath the level of which the house had sunk so far that steps led down, instead of up, to its door. Of this Stanley Parker was well aware; and, perceiving that the heavy, iron-studded door stood ajar, and that Maurice, walking well in front, was still rapt in contemplation of the ancient house, the pleasant fancy of kicking the boy down the steps against the door occurred to him. He instantly acted upon it with a sudden rush forward, that shot Bertram, like a living cannon-ball, against the yielding door and into the middle of the room into which it directly opened, to the loud and delighted laughter of Dick and Hugh, the twelve- and ten-year-old brothers of the sublime Stanley, laughter quickly stilled by a sound fraternal cuff on each boy's ear, which enjoined them to imitate their elder's instant flight down the street and round the first corner, leading to their own domains. Maurice had enjoyed exquisite shudders over an illustrated *Foxe's Martyrs*; he compared the anguish of his unceremonious entrance, his loss of consciousness, and subsequent pleasant awakening, to the sensations of those tortured saints.

The ancient oaken door was hard, the iron-work binding and studding it harder; Bertram's head, luckily protected by a thick mat of curly yellow hair, piteously soft by comparison. He felt as if he had come all at once in contact with the whole hard, round world, which cracked loudly and vanished in splinters of fire, himself with it. After what seemed a long time, a consciousness of pain returned, and his eyes opened. He found himself laid on a large old-fashioned sofa, in the cushions of which his small bruised body was almost lost. He looked up at a low ceiling, crossed by heavy black beams, then out on the sunny street through a wide, low, mullioned window, and past the half-open oaken door. The room was panelled and hung with oil paintings; Henry the Eighth, jovial and hard, in his ruff and feathered cap, looked disparagingly down upon him; also a Tudor lady, with ringed hands stiffly upheld, so as to display every articulation and contour without perspective.

An oak table was in the middle of the room, a pot of flowers

on the deep window-seat, a large pot of green boughs in the broad fireplace, near which a high-backed settle made a sheltered corner. Over him bent a woman's face, pitying, tender, with deep, soft eyes; gentle hands were laying cool, wet bandages on his head, a bowl of water on a stool near was tinged with blood; an exquisite cool fragrance seemed to pervade everything, and protect him even from the hard disparagement of Henry the Eighth's too well-known gaze, painfully suggestive of geography and arithmetic to follow. A figure by the window in a widow's dress turned in a high-backed chair and spoke.

'Is the injury serious, Grace?' she said, in a deep woman's voice.

'No, mother; he has recovered consciousness," a lighter voice replied. 'We must keep him very quiet, and send him home in the cool of the evening.'

These words repeated themselves over and over in his brain, until he heard the grey-haired lady in the window presently speak of writing to the rectory to say why the boy was kept at the house.

'And I earnestly trust that young Parker will receive the severe chastisement his cowardly violence merits,' she added, in measured tones.

Then Maurice shook off his languor and sat up. 'Oh, please, please, don't tell!' he cried; 'he'll think I've split on him. Besides, he does kick so beastly hard.'

'Schoolboy honour, dear mother. Might you not say "an accident"? It was I who saw the kicking from behind the boys in the street; you only saw the poor little fellow fall into the house, you know.'

'Please say a accident!' implored Maurice.

'I certainly will,' replied the elder lady. 'He must not be agitated, Grace, you see. Are you related to Mr. Parker, my dear?'

'If you please, I'm his nephew. Cousin Stanley has to make a man of me. It takes an awful lot of knocks to make a man of a fellow. But I shan't never be anything but a squinnying kid if they don't knock me about,' he explained, while a note was being penned in stately and formal phrase, and read aloud to his satisfaction. Then he lay back, calm and happy, and fell asleep.

This room, used partly as a hall, partly as a dining-room, led into the actual hall, where they dined that day, and into which the porch and many rooms opened, and whence an uncarpeted oak staircase led to the first floor. Sunlight fell through the porch, flower scents entered by it, in a corner of the hall was a tall,

carved oaken clock, the steady, monotonous tick of which lulled the boy when he woke into a drowsy languor, and was ever after as the heart-beat of happiness to him. The peace of that long, sweet summer day in the cool, silent house; the rest, not only from kicks and knocks and every kind of bodily torture, but from sneers and jeers and constant petty tyranny! Only to be quiet and unmolested till bedtime was heaven to this small victim of schoolboy savagery.

In the meantime Uncle Matt, carving mutton at luncheon in the Parsonage, took no notice of the small gap at table; the plates went round in order, accompanied by desultory conversation of elders. Stanley kicked Hugh, and Hugh kicked Dick under the table, in token that the absence was unobserved. Uncle Matt paused, hot and thirsty, and drank before carving his own portion. Then, perceiving two plates remaining before him, he glanced round to see who had been overlooked in the carving; and there, in place of the small face and yellow hair he was used to see rising above the white cloth, was vacancy.

'Where is Maurice?' he asked in a tone of irritation.

'Why, where *is* Maurice?' his wife echoed; 'how very tiresome that child is!'

'Hullo! what 's up with Maria?' cried Stanley, looking round with affected surprise at the empty place. 'You fellows seen the dear girl this morning?'

'Was that Maria we saw in the gooseberry bed after breakfast?' asked Hugh innocently. 'No wonder the sweet girl can't show to dinner.'

The father of four sons and three daughters looked at Stanley, Hugh, and Dick, and knew there was mischief afoot; also that those fine, frank fellows were lying, yet he did not count them liars; he was aware that schoolboy ethics permit many kinds of lies, especially to elders.

'Nothing like school to take the nonsense out of boys and form their characters,' was a favourite axiom of his. 'You are in charge of Maurice, Stanley,' he said abruptly; 'find him at once.'

'My dear,' expostulated his wife, 'Stanley is not a nursemaid. Do let the boy dine.'

'Ach! Mr. Stanley!' cried the German governess, 'this is not just. We did see you—Lucy, do cease to pince me!—we did see you all tree with ze little Maurice walk out zis morning.'

Father, mother, and children all looked angrily at her. Stanley swore beneath his breath.

'Nasty, spiteful tell-tale!' murmured the little girls. 'Beastly sneak!' the boys.

'Really, Fräulein, I think you must be mistaken,' remonstrated Mrs. Parker, suddenly remembering to have seen the four boys set off together with a towel to bathe, and inwardly execrating what she termed foreigners' want of tact.

'Ach! Gott! No,' persisted the too candid Fräulein; 'Lucy did call ze dogue back, Ethel did tell Maurice to not s-queal.'

The peace of this Christian household was thus sadly imperilled when the boy called in from the street by Mrs. Dorrien arrived with her note, which Mr. Parker read in serious disquiet, and then handed to his wife, who said something about responsibility and other people's children.

'These good ladies would die of fright if they spent one day with our children, dear old fusses,' she added in conclusion. 'I suppose Maurice roared, and they thought him half killed.'

'Maria *can* roar,' observed Stanley with a thoughtful air.

'Not when unconscious, sir,' returned his father sternly. 'Go to the study and wait there till I come. You, Dick, go to your room, and Hugh to the schoolroom.'

When Mr. Parker, immediately after luncheon, visited these places of detention in succession, he took a hunting-crop in his hand. This he wielded in a manner that surprised his sons—even Dick, who had prudently utilised the leisure intended for meditation on his sins by putting on three pairs of trousers and several woollen jerseys. The boys' surprise was mingled with another feeling that led to a serious consultation between them later in the day, as to the manner in which these emotions were to be conveyed to Maurice upon his return, which occurred before they went to bed, and of which they were not aware until they retired to their own rest.

'Pray, Maria dear, did you spend a happy day?' was Stanley's falsetto greeting to the unfortunate child, half asleep in the room he shared with his cousins. Whereupon Maurice replied in ecstasy, cheerfully sitting up in bed to tell his tale, and ending by saying he rather hoped Stanley would kick him into the Old House again to-morrow.

'Do you, my sweet girl?' returned Stanley, in the same facetious falsetto; 'but darling Maria must learn not to wag its little tell-tale tongue again. Maria need not go to sleep any more to-night. She must be kept cool and quiet, so out she goes! A cool and airy situation, darling!' With that, in spite of piteous protestations of innocence, the boy was taken from his bed and

pushed through the window, a small, shivering, white figure in the thin summer darkness.

'Good-night, darling,' crooned the three tyrants in falsetto, carefully hasping the window, and retiring with derisive gestures to their respective couches, where they soon slept the deep sleep commonly ascribed to innocence.

The boys' room was a long chamber under the roof, with dormer windows, in and out of which they were accustomed to climb. When ejected and locked out, Maurice found himself standing on a ledge a foot deep, protected only by a piece of turned-up lead that held rain from the eaves below. Holding on to the tiled roof of the window, he was a spectacle to his cousins as they rapidly undressed, that only delighted them while it amused him not at all; therefore, seeing no probability of a speedy release, he moved cautiously, feeling in the glimmering darkness for a foothold, round to the angle made by the spring of the window from the roof, and found that the lead was continued just far enough to give him precarious foothold.

Here he turned, facing the gulf of darkness sheer beneath him. The night was soft and balmy, every leaf still as if carven, the tiles warm with the heat of many hours' summer sunshine, the roof slope was good to rest on; after all, the situation was not without charm. It was unusual, even romantic, to sleep on a roof. A boy who had passed a night in his shirt on a roof without crying could never be called a milksop. Everybody in the house —Uncle Matt, Aunt Em, and all—was comfortably tucked up in a mere bed, prosaically sleeping; he, Maurice, waked and watched alone. He was a warder on a castle wall, a sailor on a masthead, the mailed guardian of enchanted treasure, anything but a wee, weary boy of seven in a nightshirt, with a bruised body and a bandaged head, perched on a parsonage roof alone in the dark.

Folding his small, thin arms, he frowned defiance at an amiable cow peacefully cropping dewy grass in the meadow, just as a sudden fan of glimmering radiance faded from the foliage beneath him; it was Uncle Matt's light going out; Uncle Matt might sleep peacefully to-night—his house was guarded.

Maurice wondered what would happen if his feet slipped from the narrow lead guard and he fell over the two-storied house to the gravel drive below? One big crunch, as when a cat eats a mouse; nothing more. Then the funeral of a small boy and hanging of a big one. The pleasantness of the latter prospect was marred by the consideration that he would not be able to see Stanley

hanged. He sighed, and felt the ache of his wounded head at this. What numbers of stars, like swarms and swarms of shining bees; were they really windows for angels to look out of? One star fell—or was it an angel carrying a new baby down to earth? —no; for it fell into that band of faintly-gleaming sea, the breath and low murmur of which stole over the marsh-lands to the Parsonage. It was growing darker and colder; flocks and flocks of stars kept stealing out from behind the others. It was very, very silent, very lonely, his lip was quivering; but he was not going to cry—oh, no! He could rouse the house easily by shouting, but that would be sneakish. Surely Stanley would open the window soon. But Stanley was fast, fast asleep. He was a fine, handsome lad, and lay carelessly with his arms thrown out, his crisp hair drooping on his temple, a placid smile on his ruddy face; the other boys slept as sweetly; they looked like three angels in their deep slumber; while the tiny lad crouched in the angle of the roof with bandaged head and bruised thin limbs—limbs only just losing the chubbiness of infancy—was more like some imp of darkness or wicked hobgoblin, rightly shut out in the cold.

A faint moan came from one boy as he turned in his sleep and pressed upon a purple weal in his flesh; the three lads were marked all over with yesterday's whip and each other's knocks and kicks, and little they cared for either, being far too well accustomed to violence. Even tiny Maurice was becoming indifferent to blows and bruises; he felt that he could but be killed, and his tremendous crash into the Old House yesterday had actually sent him to sleep. The Old House lay higher than the Parsonage; he had seen its lights go out; Miss Dorrien little knew where he was. This reflection, curiously enough, made a lump come in his throat.

The church clock struck one, the chill grew and made him shiver; no, he was *not* going to cry; perhaps that beast Stanley might come out and see the tears he dashed off with his sleeve. How delightful that day had been! They had asked him to come again, those two dear, sweet ladies. There would always be something pleasant now, however wretched he might be. He recalled it all dreamily, shutting his tired, wet eyes Dinner in the hall, looking on the sunny garden. The two ladies and himself; their pleasant, quiet, soft voices, gentle movements; no noisy boys and girls, no wrangling, no chiding, no savage kicks and pinches under the table, nothing spilt. Such fare! Instead of common meat and pudding, such as people had every day,

milk and home-baked bread, dark and delicious, with butter and fresh ripe fruit; no meat, nothing heating, because he had to be kept cool. Salad and honey. Then the afternoon peace on a sofa with a leaf of white currants, like pearls, to amuse him, and later, a story read out to him, and music, soft music played on a guitar. Tea in the garden in the cool shadows of walnut-trees; time told by the sundial, a thing new to him, and all explained.

'Miss Dorrien, Uncle Matt says you've seen better days. When was there better days van vis?'

'When you are older, Maurice, you will not repeat anything you hear said. Would you like to go and see the bees?'

'Miss Dorrien, is it true vat vere's great heaps of gold under ve house? And did Oliver Cromwell frow the keys of the Secret Chamber away? And who sleeps in ve Tapestry Room? And will you marry me when I'm grown up?'

These ladies were usually, in the pictures his after-memory called up, busied in making *pot-pourri*, the rose-leaves for which he helped collect, or sewing grains of lavender in muslin bags; unless they were in the withdrawing-room, a large sunny room on the first floor, wainscoted in white and gold, with a chimney-piece carved with armorial bearings, and trophies of arms, and a fireplace fitted with blue-and-white tiles, bearing the story of David. The room was a marvel of faded, threadbare splendour, its strips of carpet mere webs, its curtains colourless with time. Its long, low, mullioned window, with its cushioned window-seat looking on the garden, towards the never-opened iron gate, was a place to dream golden dreams in. It often held a very little boy in its cosiest corner, with his legs tucked under him, his elbow on the window-sill, his head on his hand, his eyes wide with wonder, while the ladies touched the worn, thin-toned harpsichord, the guitar, or the harp, sometimes singly, sometimes together, sometimes with singing, sometimes without, and the child's soul wandered blissfully away in a paradise of music and marvel.

Faded splendour, faded, sorrow-stricken ladies, worn voices, old songs and aged instruments, broken-stringed, yet opening the gates of a world of beauty and glamour to one young creature, basking in the eternal youth of sunshine and of summer growth in garden and orchard! The boy's tongue had been loosed that first day at tea under the walnut-trees; all fear of the two ladies had vanished then and for ever. He prattled on as he never dared at the Parsonage, told them his little history, how he had come to Barling last Easter. He was younger then; he cried in the first days; but Stanley thrashed him, so he had to leave off.

He used to live with his grandfather and Mrs. Munn; his grandfather sat in a chair all day long; his head always shook. Mrs. Munn was scarcely ever cross; she wore a black cap and spectacles.

'Have *you* a grandfather, Miss Dorrien? and does his head shake?'

Miss Dorrien started, and looked at her mother, who answered for her—

'My daughter has a grandfather. He is called Sir Geoffrey Harbord. His head never shakes. Where does your grandfather live, Maurice?'

'He lives in heaven now. He lived at home then. Mrs. Dorrien, do ghosts come every night and talk to you and wing veir hands?'

'Every night, and all night long, ay, and every day, she replied in a low, moaning voice, gazing away and away into a world of dreams. 'They speak, oh yes! they speak, and they wring their hands, they wail, they weep. Ghosts and shadows, shadows and ghosts, dreams, dreams, dreams. Veiled and shrouded, dim and bright, sweet and sad. All, all is phantasm. We are phantoms, we are shades; the very dust is peopled with us and ours, even the motes in the sunbeam—phantoms, dreams, dust.' Her voice had slipped into a monotonous chant, her head swayed from side to side; the boy gazed at her with open eyes and mouth. The daughter diverted his attention.

'Look, Maurice,' she said, pointing to the sky, across the blue spaces of which gulls were sailing on curved soft wings to the sea, 'they are going home to their nests in the sea-cliffs.'

'Miss Dorrien,' was Maurice's last observation before they reached the Parsonage, whither she took him at dusk; 'I 've been looking for ve crack all day, and I can't see it nowhere.'

'What crack, where, Maurice?'

'In Mrs. Dorrien. Aunt Emily said she was cracked, but I can't see any crack.'

'Never look for cracks, Maurice. Besides, there is none there. It is a mistake,' replied a voice deepened by deep sadness. 'Good-night, Maurice. God bless you!' added the childless woman to the motherless child.

Golden memories of that golden day kept the tears from his eyes; but they also lulled him to perilous drowsiness; his head nodded forward, he jerked it back and shivered in the growing chillness. Something sprang out of the darkness right upon him; he gave one shrill, soon-smothered shriek, and was answered by

the familiar mew of his friend Tim, the grey cat. Darkness was thinning now, cocks were crowing, harvest fields glimmering with more and more certainty, the sea taking a pallid gleam, the damp chill growing sharper. Tim's warmth and purring friendliness were welcome to the shivering, tired child. But with sunrise warmth came, and he fell asleep.

'Zummat white up top of Parsonage,' said a reaper going afield in the dewy sunshine. 'Looks like bedclothes.'

Some holy presence must surely have watched over the boy's perilous sleep. He lay back in his angle, the cat nestling to him, and did not stir; his stiff, cold feet kept their precarious position on the narrow ledge, until Stanley waked in the early sunshine at the sound of a whetstone on a scythe, and dragged him in, having first gone through a good wholesome fright on his account.

The brief but dangerous illness resulting from the night's exposure was attributed by Aunt Emily to the wet bandages and cooling of 'those dear old fusses at the Old House'; the doctor set it down to bathing. The four boys said nothing.

CHAPTER II

It was a long time since the Old House had received a child-guest; the unexpected irruption of the small Bertram proved so welcome and interesting a distraction, and his position in his uncle's house was so provocative of pity, that the Dorriens undertook the charge of his convalescence; thus the process of making a man of him, which had so nearly resulted in the production of a small corpse, was beneficently arrested by his sojourn in the Old House until his three cousins had returned each to his respective school.

'Promise me, dear Mrs. Dorrien,' said Mrs. Parker, on taking Bertram to the Old House, 'to send him home the moment he is at all troublesome or gets into the slightest mischief.'

'Surely Maurice is not mischievous?'

'We never tell tales out of school,' his aunt replied archly. 'But I do know a boy quite as young as Maurice, who gets up in the night to steal fruit from a walled garden.'

Maurice coloured and hung his head, tears tingling in his eyes. He had indeed stolen fruit, having been told by Stanley and Dick, who hoisted him over the wall and into a tree, whence he could descend and fill his pockets, that they would cut him into ribbons if he did not. But he had eaten none, not so much from conscientious scruples as because his cousins had been so

obliging as to take that portion of the trespass entirely upon themselves. On one mournful occasion he had been caught red-handed, and delivered up to justice, the cousins on the lawful side of the wall promptly fleeing and leaving him to his fate. Thus early in life did Bertram learn the world's commandment, 'Thou shalt not be found out—all else is lawful unto thee.'

Theologians descant upon the evil heart of the natural man; of the natural boy, untamed by submission to the needs and weakness of others, it may be said that he is a budding demon, to whom power means an opportunity of indulging the inborn lust of cruelty.

'I like boys to be boys,' Mrs. Parker was accustomed to say; 'I hate prigs and mollycoddles; and I am thankful to say our boys are neither. One naturally expects the house to be turned upside down in the holidays, but even holidays come to an end. As for teasing the girls, what can you expect? They must learn to keep their tempers and make their brothers happy, and so train themselves to be wives. Home is dull for boys after school.' Thus Mrs. Parker, like many a mother, strained every nerve to exaggerate the boyishness of her boys and cultivate the latent savagery and sturdy animal selfishness of her sons, while for moral excellence she turned entirely to her daughters.

Stanley had soon discovered that Maurice was innocent of the tale-telling for which he was put out of the window; further, that the history of that night on the roof had never been revealed. From Stanley's singular moral standpoint, the child's conduct had been ideal; loyalty, endurance, and pluck had been exhibited in a marked degree, scarcely to be expected even from a Winchester prefect, much less from a tiny fellow hardly out of the nursery. Yet his tyrant had made not the smallest amends to him. He had not intended to keep the boy on the roof for more than an hour, and knew quite well that little short of a miracle had saved his life and limbs.

'After all,' he observed to his brothers, 'Maria's a good plucked one. How the little beggar kept his head and stuck on the roof all night, without even squealing, I'm blest if I know. Though she didn't sneak, Maria'll know what to expect if she ever wants to; so will you fellows.'

There were no servants at the Old House, except one woman who did rough work, and a man who occasionally dug the garden. It seemed a cheerful and pleasant arrangement to Maurice, who made a serviceable little brownie, fetching and carrying, helping to weed, pick fruit, feed the fowls, and sweep leaves away; and these occupations made the hours fleet so

quickly that there was no time for boyish mischief, which is the misapplication of pent-up energy. Nor did it appear strange to Maurice that Mrs. Dorrien only employed herself in light and ornamental tasks, rising late and finding everything prepared for her as in a house full of servants, while the younger lady was up almost with the summer sun and never idle all the long day. Often Mrs. Dorrien called the boy Geoffrey; her daughter told him to accept the name without remark.

'My brother, who died at your age, was called Geoffrey,' she explained.

Mrs. Dorrien was really beautiful. Her snow-white, abundant hair was smoothed plainly under a white cap; her dress, always black, was of antiquated cut, and good but shabby material; a sapphire and diamond brooch at her throat clasped folds of white muslin. She was slight and erect; her deep blue eyes, matching the sapphires, were very bright, yet dreamy; her lips moved often when she was silent—a peculiarity that fascinated the boy, who would sit long watching the working lips in a sort of dream, with vague and wild imaginings as to what she was saying. Her hands, usually busy with some dainty needlework, were white and slender, and sparkled with jewels. Maurice was at an age when beauty is measured by deeds, and grown-up people are all about the same age; he held both ladies to be lovely, the most lovely he had ever seen; their faces and forms were traced indelibly upon his memory; so that in after-years their beauty, grace, and good breeding were palpable to him in differing degrees and kind. Miss Dorrien's dark hair, unmixed with grey, her dark eyes, and a certain suppressed vivacity in her gaze and movements, separated her widely from her mother in his memory. There was also a curious watchfulness in the younger lady, that formed a marked contrast to the mother's dreaminess and absent-minded moods.

Mrs. Dorrien was a wondrous story-teller; her fairy tales, delivered in a deep, impressive voice, with well-balanced phrase, thrilling pause, lowered tone, and dramatic movements; her clear enunciation, well-chosen words, and absorbed air, carried the child far away into the heart of the marvellous; all fairy lore in books was tame and poor after those narratives.

From her he first heard, and never forgot, the curious experiences of Sindbad the Sailor, that Arabian Ulysses; the singular adventures of Aladdin and of Ali Baba; of that strange vase fished up from the sea, whence the imprisoned genius rose gigantic in a towering column of smoke; whilst old favourites, such as

Cinderella, Snowbelle, and Hansel and Grisel, acquired fresh charm and distinction from Mrs. Dorrien's recital.

Sometimes she related actual experiences, anecdotes of other days. At these times she became absent and absorbed, and always addressed Maurice as Geoffrey, if not too much lost in memories to be conscious of his presence; she spoke of 'your father,' 'your grandfather,' and 'your sisters, Grace and Laura.' These tales, though less interesting, still had sufficient charm at times to touch the impressionable wax of a seven-year-old memory; they returned in after-times to throw light on the whole story of those two strangely burdened lives.

The history of the Old House was of such minor interest to Mrs. Dorrien, that Maurice learned to consider it as exclusively Miss Dorrien's subject; thus it was from her that he gathered —somewhat to his disappointment—that the ancestral ghosts were too well-bred to intrude without invitation upon the privacy of the present occupants; and that the singularly fiendish yells, and shrieks, and moans, sometimes occurring about and after nightfall, were occasioned by wind, rats, rusty hinges, and ill-fitting windows and doors. Particularly it was enjoined upon him that his own little room, opening into Miss Dorrien's, which in turn opened into her mother's, was absolutely inaccessible to any manner of ghost. Still, to make assurance doubly sure, his door was left open, and, in case of the slightest suggestion of the supernatural, he was bidden to call loudly upon Miss Dorrien by name, a thing no ghost can stand, as he well knew. Therefore he curled cosily and in full security into his downy, lavender-scented nest, and slept sweetly, when not too conscious of the extreme delight of being on a visit at the Old House. For sometimes the rapture was too keen for sleep, his heart throbbed so strongly in anticipation of the long, delicious bliss of the next day, the hall-clock ticked with such steady and continuous assurance of joy and peace, that his pulse accompanied it in double beats, two to every tick, and almost stood still at the clear, ringing strokes that told the hours. What is more terrible than the demon Insomnia? What darker than a *nuit blanche*, a wakeful night? And what more exquisitely delightful than such a night, when sleep, the friend of the sorrowful and healer of sickness, withdraws in sweet deference to a still sweeter presence, unsealing young eyes that they may look upon their bliss, and, having made quite sure of it, turn voluptuously back to the pleasant Nirvana that must break soon in joy?

So Maurice lay one summer night in his soft bed, lulling him-

self with delicious anticipation of the pleasant, peaceful morrow, and basking in the remembered happiness of yesterday's long, sunny hours—hours that echoed with old songs, old instruments, heard in the ancient white-and-gold room, and with fairy tales, told in drowsy afternoon stillness under the walnut-trees. Dimly through the uncurtained square of the latticed window he could see a pale sky sprinkled with silver stars, and a tree-top, still and faintly grey, in a silence that might be felt. Outside was the sweet pallor of a summer night; inside, heavy shadows, touched here and there with pale glimmerings that revealed objects in mass with vague, uncertain outline. Tick-tock, tick-tock, throbbed the drowsy, steady clock through the night silence—why did the clock talk so loud in the night, so low in the day?—a sigh broke the even rhythm of sleeping breath from Miss Dorrien's pillow in the next room; she moved and spoke softly, moaningly, in her sleep; surely there was another sound, a curious rustling as of wings, another voice moaning, almost sobbing.

Maurice turned, with quickened heart-beats and throbbing temples, to a glimmering lane of what was scarcely light, yet something paler than darkness; and there, slowly, steadily gliding through the room into which his own opened on the other side—not Miss Dorrien's—and through a door usually locked, came towards him a figure veiled in white, with wrung hands and anguished gesture. It was the White Lady, the dreaded ghost. His blood turned to ice in his veins; he was near swooning.

'Speak to me,' it pleaded in a deep, low voice; 'speak once, only once, and forgive! oh! at last forgive!'

The hair on the boy's flesh stood up; he tried to shriek, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth; the vision swam before him, as it glided slowly, slowly, past the foot of his bed towards Miss Dorrien's room, still pleading in that deep, fervid, moaning voice—

'No pity? None? Still implacable? Oh, father, husband, child, child! Speak once, only once! No hope? No pity anywhere? All lost, lost, lost!'

Maurice still sat up in his bed, with wide eyes, bristling hair, and cold, wet brow, struggling vainly, as in a nightmare, to shriek, when another voice fell like balm on his ear, for it came from Miss Dorrien's room:

'Mother,' it said softly, 'hush! oh, hush! Dear mother, you will waken the boy, little Maurice!'

'No, no, no; the boy will never wake; never, never, never!' wailed the other voice, in tones of exceeding anguish, 'never, never, never!'

'Dear, you are dreaming again,' murmured the other voice caressingly. 'Come now, let me sponge your forehead; let me read to you; may I?'

Maurice, still trembling all over, and wet through with anguish, fell back on his pillow, almost swooning in the relaxed tension of his nerves; instinctive, inherited honour forbade him, in spite of curiosity and the interest of a half-told tragedy, to listen. He coughed, drew the bedclothes over his ears till even the clock's steady tick-tock was shut out; and very soon his strained and wearied mind slipped down, down and down, into deepest gulfs of dreamless sleep till morning.

'My mother was unwell in the night; I hope you were not disturbed, Maurice,' Miss Dorrien said next morning, when they were in the garden gathering vegetables; 'she had bad dreams.'

'He had not been disturbed,' he replied; but with such a crimson face and such an attempt to hide it behind a rank of peas, that Miss Dorrien looked at him earnestly and said—

'Tell me exactly what you saw and heard, Maurice,' and he told her all except his fright.

'Poor child!' she replied, with a troubled look; 'you will never talk of this, will you? Say as little about us as possible outside these doors. When people are old and have had much ——trouble, they often dream about things and think about them in the night. And sometimes they cannot—rest——' Miss Dorrien's voice suddenly broke; she put her hands before her face. The boy trembled, and knew not where to look; he thought she was crying.

'I don't want to be old,' he said, to cover an embarrassing silence; 'I always fink of nice fings in the night, and what I shall do when I'm grown up. I fink I shall be a pirate and wear free swords and two pistols, and sail round and round ve world,' he added, looking towards a blue belt of sea shining at the foot of sandstone cliffs in summer morning brightness. 'Did *you* ever want to be a pirate, Miss Dorrien?'

'No; *I* wanted to be a circus-rider and jump through hoops; a long time ago, Maurice. Oh! *so* long ago!' She smiled a strange little smile, and looked into the earnest blue eyes of the small Maurice, who was small for his age. One charm of such a little fellow's society is the return to childhood and the long-buried feelings and forgotten mental attitude of childhood it brings. To talk to a child of seven is to look at life from a seven-year-old point of view, whence life looks very different from its real self. There is something extremely droll and scarcely

credible in the idea of having once been seven oneself, and still more so of having earnestly desired to ride three horses at once round a circus in a short, spangled skirt and a wreath of paper roses. An hour may strike when other, later desires and more passionate ambitions may seem as quaint and futile. The disappointment that now corrodes and crushes, and the fulfilment that brings such joy, may become equally unimportant and trivial.

Maurice sent Miss Dorrien's memory back to its springs, to those vague, poetic beginnings of consciousness, that are to individual lives what legendary times are to nations: 'And I, too, was born in Arcadia.'

Her Arcadia was infinitely brighter and gayer than this poor unloved child's. It was more like some glittering fairy tale. A wealthy home, gay dresses, sumptuous fare, beautiful surroundings, many pleasures; a graceful and charming mother, in sheen of satin, rustle of silk, and sparkle of jewels; a fine, stalwart father, in gay uniform, glittering with gold; carriages and horses, and bright-apparelled servants;—such was the gilded frame of a picture worthy of a rich setting. There was little but happiness in those far days—a brother and sister and many playmates to share the toys and sports. If Geoffrey and Laura were the mother's favourites, Grace was the father's darling, indulged and petted as she wished. She saw herself playing with his sword, trying to put the heavy helmet on her small curly head, riding in front of him on his great charger when he came off parade; her mischief laughed at, her saucy sayings applauded, her wilfulness a source of mirth. Sound of arms, military music, beat of drum, measured tramp of infantry, thud and clank of cavalry; the rhythmic glitter of moving masses of armed men, waving plumes and fluttering pennons, attended and environed these early memories. What is this that rises out of memory before her?

A wide plain, coloured by masses of soldiers; bugle-calls, hoarse words of command, galloping aides-de-camp, blown white plumes, thunder of artillery, shine of rumbling gun-carriages, flash of bared sabres, white quiver of bayonet blades above a moving glow of scarlet, blue, and gold; flower-like brilliance of ladies and children in carriages, with an all-pervading martial music.

A little girl in white is sitting on the floor of her mother's crowded barouche, with her feet on the step, near the saluting post; she is all eyes and ears, and looks now at the general and his staff on their restless chargers, and now at the passing

pageant of saluting soldiers. A Highland regiment, preceded by pipers in eagle-plumed bonnet and brooched plaid, had marched by at the double, with swaying kilts and towering feather bonnets. A pause ensued; the more familiar music of the kettle-drum was heard, and then the cry of a bugle, that meant Charge! Then, out of the dusty distance, gleaming through rolling clouds of smoke, thundered the well-known dragoons, sabres flashing, helmets blazing in the sunshine, a splendid spectacle, attracting all eyes. Then the little girl, with a shrill, joyous cry of 'Dad!' springs from the carriage steps, and darts like a white bird straight in front of the troop of galloping horses. A loud shriek from many women, a deep groan from many men; the small, white-plumed figure is swallowed in the dust of the horses' feet; she is surely under them. The small heart throbs to bursting, as the living wave of black steeds and glittering riders rolls upon her; her eyes close; she is lost. There is breathless silence for three seconds; then a thundering cheer rises and reverberates over the plain, as a trooper in the first rank leans from his charger, and something white is seen to rise and settle in front of his saddle, and so head the charge, like a white gull on the crest of a long breaker, and the child is safe.

That was an exhilarating memory—the deadly terror, the sudden, saving snatch by the short skirts, the secure bliss of being swung up to the saddle, the giddy terror of seeing the large, white-plumed hat devoured by the horses' hoofs, the final rapture of the charge itself, the thundering onrush in mid-air, the wind of their motion in her face, nothing in front but the charger's maned neck, the security of the trooper's clutch on her clothing, her wind-blown curls sweeping over his cuirass.

This was long ago; but she could even now see the look on her father's face, his great dark eyes shadowed by the helmet, and flashing with mingled anger, pride, and amusement, his assumed frown and hearty burst of laughter, as he first lightly struck her with his gauntlet, and then snatched her up against his steel-bound chest and kissed her.

'You little rascal!' he cried; 'you chip of the old block!'

There was a faint memory of being handed round to be kissed, of talk about 'the new recruit,' of drawn sabres arched above her head, vague and unconnected as a dream.

Memory amply justified her father's various names—Scape-Grace, Dis-Grace, Graceless. Scarcely out of one scrape, she was in another. 'The child must be possessed,' her mother would cry; 'the more I punish her, the naughtier she is!' If clocks

went wrong, taps were found flowing, stable-doors set open, and things lost, it was 'Miss Gracie again!' or 'That dreadful child!' Thirst for information, a strong wish to acquire an experimental knowledge of life too early, often result in catastrophes;—as, for instance, when a match is put to a little train connected with a powder-flask just to see what will happen; when curls are cut close to the head by way of improvement, or the wide hall chimney climbed in hope to catch the star at the top instead of a whipping below. That imitation, which is the sincerest flattery, sometimes beguiles to such fiascos as the following. To come into the drawing-room—having previously escaped from dessert, at which one appears *point devise* from the nurse's hands—in rouge, pearl powder, and eyelid black, somewhat crudely applied, and taken from the toilet of a lady guest of uncertain age.

Three days' confinement to nursery, though sweetened by an hour's daily companionship with a father, seemed at five years an unjust and unaccountable sequence upon such an act. But when, at nine years, it occurred to Scape-Grace to get up in the small hours, unlock the stables, saddle a hunter, and ride him seven miles to see the sun rise out of the sea, motives were not the purest. The raciest flavour of the night's enjoyment was a dare-devil sense of wickedness combined with peril. Mrs. Dorrien once recounted that history to Maurice. The horror of the morning's double discovery that the child was missing, that the stables had been broken into, and one of the most valuable hunters abstracted, and the subsequent saddling of horses and the scouring of the country round. At breakfast time, in hot autumn sunshine, a thud of hoofs on the drive, and the appearance of the weight-carrier, Black Prince, surmounted by a small girl in a dusty, dew-drenched habit. The tired and famished creature's attempt at self-possession as she appeared with a jaunty 'Afwaid I 'm late for bweakfast,' and a piteous attempt not to cry. Where had she been? Only to Sandport to see the sun rise. Mr. Welby said last night it was wicked to miss such a sight.'

'What the devil made you take Black Prince?' the father thundered; 'the horse is ruined.'

'I was afwaid it would be too far for poor Midget,' with a few tears winked away.

'She is more trouble than ten boys. What *is* to be done with her?' was the mother's despairing cry. 'A wicked, bad-hearted, mischievous girl!'

'Suppose I 'd better be thwashed.'

'Thrashed indeed! Girls are not thrashed. She ought to be sent to a strict school. Not that any school would admit so ill behaved a girl. What is to become of her? Thanks to your persistent indulgence, Clarence, she will never be any good for anything.'

'Pwaps,' was the culprit's sobbed-out reply, not told to Maurice —while two fists were screwed into eyes half hidden by curls— 'pwaps—I may—be—food—for powder—some day!'

But not even this curious social duty had been fulfilled by the weary woman in the old garden, looking wistfully into the forlorn child's blue, innocent eyes, with who can say what uprising of long-buried hopes and long-crushed feelings.

'Poor boy!' she said, 'and so you would like to be a pirate!' Yet he knew that she was thinking of something else.

'Oh, grandmother, what great eyes you have got!' he thought, fascinated by the large bright gaze of eyes that expressed something more than a child could understand. 'Too restless,' Mr. Cartmell, the village surgeon, thought; 'Too proud,' Mrs. Parker, 'Defiant and half-pagan,' Mr. Parker averred. But to little Maurice the eyes were kind and sweet, though dominant, even fear-inspiring. 'A reg'lar gipsy,' Chip, the man who dug the garden, sometimes confided to his wife; 'she do look anybody drough and drough. There's something about Miss Dorrien makes cold jowers hrun down my backbone. It is not entirely Christian in a manner o' sayen. They girt black eyes do vlare and vlash like a wild thing caught in a gin. Do ee mind that there herren hung up under shelf? The weather was muggy and a went fousty, and the eyes of en shined out in the dark like blue vire. I 'lows they two eyes gave me a steart when I came hoam.'

'Ah! you 'lowed wold Nick was come vor ee at last, Chip. And serve ee right, staying out a-nights. So Miss Dorrien's eyes mind ye of a herren gone bad in the dark? They say there's that on her mind fit to make anybody afeard to go to bed without a candle, let alone the wold lady. Some say 'tis she screeching a-nights, some say 'tis ghosts. It makes anybody creep to think of.' Yet they both loved Grace well, especially Chip.

Opposite the Old House stood the *Bugle Inn*, before which the four-horse coach, rattling through Barling every afternoon at four o'clock, stopped for five minutes to drop and pick up passengers and parcels. The blast of its horn stirred sleep-enchanted Barling to momentary life. People peeped from windows and doors, some even went into the street at the sound of that cheery horn; all eyes

were bent on the four fine bays cantering along the street, and drawing up with clatter and plunge by the *Bugle*. Out came ostlers to sponge the horses' mouths; out came a ladder to let people on and off the coach; up bustled the postman with his truck to catch the sealed mail-sacks as they flew from the coach, and wheel them off before the ladder was withdrawn, the horn wound, the iron hoofs again beat the hard road with quick, blithe rhythm, and the crowd of shrilly-cheering children running after, were left behind in the dust.

At the first distant sound of the horn, Mrs. Dorrien rose, sometimes from slumber, and hurried, pink with agitation, to the small window of the drawing-room looking on the street, and stood there with joined, shaking hands, to watch for the first gleam of satiny coats and shining harness, as the coach came in sight and dashed by, the outside passengers' eyes level with hers. These she scanned eagerly, her mouth working tremulously all the time. As the coach went by, she turned slowly, following it with her eyes till it stopped; then her agitation increased, and Maurice observed the quiver of her head that reminded him of his grandfather.

While mail-bags were flying, ostlers bustling, and passengers ascending and descending, Mrs. Dorrien was always trying to use the eyeglass she wore, and always failing, because of her shaking hand and head. And when the coach dashed off on its impatient way, whip-crack and horn-blast made her shudder and shrink together, as she looked anxiously at the dropped passenger—for it was seldom the coach brought more than one, if any—recognised some familiar local face, and turned away with a sort of grey despair settling on her features. Sometimes she cried with a little piteous sound, like a hurt child; then her daughter kissed and soothed her with a curious flash in her great lustrous eyes. And always at that time some movement was suggested—a turn in the garden, a seat under the walnuts, on a wet day, music.

Had she been watching the day he came, Maurice wondered, and seen him, stiffened by the chill wind of a bleak March day, dazed with solitude and strangeness, with tear-stained cheeks and trembling lips, lifted from the coach, and left with his small trunk on the kerbstone, till an ostler had leisure to shoulder the little trunk and take it, followed by its shivering, hungry owner, to the chill and cheerless hospitality of the Rectory? Had she, he pondered, as a grown man, acted this mournful pantomime long; perhaps for many years, growing grey in disappointment? All his life long this spectacle of daily expectation and daily

disappointment, of shaking head and hands and despairing face, rose before him as a symbol and embodiment of hope deferred and the heart-sickness that follows. Years afterwards, the eyes of a mother-cat defending her young, piteous in their helpless rage and tenderness, struck him to the heart's core, and brought back the flame and fury in Grace Dorrien's soft eyes when she soothed her mother's pitiful crying. For whom did that anxious face and always baffled gaze watch? Whose coldness, falsehood, cruelty, or neglect made that aged face quiver and grey head shake? Might the longed-for eyes and ever-expected step be still in death, or bound in some invincible adamant of circumstance? There was indignation and wrath, as well as sorrow and pity, in the daughter's fiery eyes. Could she be angry with fate, or indignant at the decree of Providence?

Of this the boy Bertram thought not at all. He jumped up at the first sound of the bugle, and ran with joyous expectation to the window to watch the little cheery stir in the street with the minute observation of a young child. But when the brief function was finished, and the coach rolled away in the sunshine, leaving behind it that grey figure of baffled hope within, and feebly shouting children, barking dogs, and dust-clouds without, and the emptiness of the village street stagnated as before, a vague, sad disappointment struck to his heart, and he, too, could have cried, but for his seven-year-old manhood.

This symbol of grey disappointment and ever-balked desire was quite distinct in Bertram's memory from the tranquil dignity of the elderly lady at the piano, and the fairy godmother telling delightful stories while she sewed lavender bags; distinct again from the ghostly midnight form of the White Lady, with wrung hands and broken lamentations, who came to be a part of those inevitable night horrors sensitive childhood accepts with never-forgotten shudders. He knew that this moaning shadow in the silent darkness had the same dear old face as she who told fairy tales under the walnuts, and made sweet music in the sunny drawing-room; yet he cowered at sight of it under the bedclothes, and feared it more than his cousins' hardest kicks and most startling nocturnal surprises; there was nothing unearthly about those cousins, their fists were reassuringly solid and fleshly.

Those fisticuffs and kicks—the primary cause of his introduction to the Old House—were also the cause of his final removal from those dear ladies who made him so happy. For Miss Dorrien, as well as Mr. Cartmel, the doctor, thought fit to call his uncle's attention to Maurice's bruised, discoloured body; and

when the rector made light of it and spoke of his own public-school experiences, and the duty of hardening boys, she told him how the child had been kicked along the road, and of the peculiar savagery of the running kick that dashed him against the iron-studded door, and flung him, stunned and bleeding, into the house, also of Maurice's great dread lest Stanley should think he had told of it. Then Mr. Parker, seeing how big a lie the three boys had acted, wished he had flogged them harder, as subsequently he did, and came to the conclusion that they were not to be trusted with so small a boy as Maurice. So the next holidays saw Maurice boarded out half the time, and the two eldest Parkers visiting for the other half, and the Easter following saw him passed on to another uncle for good.

Sorrowful enough the boy had been when the coach first dropped him at Barling, but still more sorrowful he was when it took him away. For he saw the poor, anxious, disappointed face at the side window of the Old House, and imagined the piteous crying that Grace would try to hush; and, bitterly as he cried when the coach had carried him and his waving handkerchief quite out of their sight, still more bitterly did he cry at the thought of Mrs. Dorrien's disappointment. That was Bertram's last sight of the house and its beloved inmates, until he stood a grown man before the rusty iron gates, and saw the walnut-trees and sundial and the ancient house dreaming still of past centuries and forgotten lives.

PART I

A.D. 185–

'Whispering tongues can poison truth.'

CHAPTER I

THE time was drawing on to Christmas, the winter was already wild up in the north country by Hardwin Hall.

A leaden sky hung low and threatening; there was in the air that singular sense of mute sorrow which forebodes snow, though as yet none had fallen on the frost-bound earth. Bare trees rattled their boughs drily in the bitter wind, that rose now and again in gusts; spreading branches of sturdy secular oaks groaned, as if complaining one to another of the season's rigour, and mourning for the sunny green of their lost summer leafage. Deer sheltered in hollows and ferny coverts; flocks of wailing plover, settled in the furrows of low-lying fields, rose with many a silver flash of white bodies against dark sky, and settled elsewhere; fieldfares fluttered in living clouds along bare brown hedges, not yet quite despoiled of berries. A bunch of fluffy brown feathers motionless on the ground showed a frozen thrush, most melancholy of Nature's sights. When the chill daylight faded into chill gloaming and chillier dark, dry grass shivered stiff in the wind, and tree-tops told each other sadder and sadder tales under the starless sky, a brightness of red-lighted windows showed Hardwin Hall on an eminence, above rounded masses of dark trees, and faintly outlined against a wooded hill behind it. At the foot of the eminence, crowned by the stately-towered building, lay a small lake, pale and grey, and cheerless as the memory of past sorrow in dreams. There is nothing more sorrowful than this wanness of still water under dark sky.

The stately house on the hill was white with the whiteness of fresh, unweathered stone; it caught and reflected all lights; even in the dark December night it gleamed ghostly white in mass, and diffused a soft glow from the fans of its lighted windows, that seemed to beckon with invitation from afar to bright and vital

warmth within. Throned in lonely grandeur, it dominated a great stretch of country; the eastern turret windows flashed back the dawn-glow, the west towers wore the blazing jewels of sunset, the long front, looking so far down across the river-fed lake, glowed in midday lustre, so that the gilded dial of a clock in the great central tower told the time for miles round.

Some straggling figures, following the dim light of a lantern, wound up the main road to the Hall; now they were lost under blackness of over-arching trees, now they cast weird, flickering shadows on frozen sward, as the lantern quivered with ambulant motion—figures of dark-clad men and boys, two carrying fiddles, one a clarionet, all grumbling in disjointed fragments of speech, with burring r's and broad, open a's.

The beautiful castellated building showed nearer and clearer and more beautiful to the straggling party, as they ascended and reached the terraced gardens; the great massed, towered, pale whiteness, starred with ruddy windows, and sparkling with outside lamps, looked unsubstantial as a vision; it was more like a castle piled by sudden enchantment, or one of those airy splendours built upon moonlit cloud-masses, and fading into nothing before a wind-gust, than a solid and comfortable habitation of prosaic British mortals. But there was substantial comfort as well as splendour and beauty within; new as the building was, it had nothing crude; the freshness, precision, and completeness of newness alone was there. Hewn stone is always beautiful, whether fresh from the mason's tool with crisp edges, or weathered and chipped by the storms and ravage of centuries; and if the masonry was new, the site was old, the traditions many; here and there an ancient piece had been preserved, renovated, and built in.

The house was full of costly and precious things, rich with treasure of art, things old and new. A malachite vase in the central hall had scarcely its parallel in the world; there were statues of marble and bronze, copies of antique and of Renaissance work, specimens of the few great contemporary sculptors, and of pictures a fine collection. Artists were still at work in some parts of the buildings, on friezes, ceilings, and panels; there was no decoration in the house not specially designed for it. The parquet flooring was exquisite, both in design and execution; there were floors of inlaid marble and walls of mosaic, a fine organ in the great central hall, the whole of which hall was designed and partly executed by one distinguished artist. Rich embroideries and costly tapestry hangings of various centuries adorned this lovely house; beautiful clocks chimed in varied

music throughout; here and there gongs of superb tone sounded the household hours. Maid-servants wore picturesque peasant costumes; the very footmen were beautifully clad.

There were even books in Hardwin Hall, boughten books, neither borrowed nor hired, *éditions de luxe*, sumptuously-bound poets—all dead except Tennyson—rare and valuable books, books in Grolier bindings, exquisitely-clad books, far too finely dressed to be read, scientific books, frivolous books, useful books, imposing rows of tall Encyclopædias, a black-letter Froissart, the sight of which made people faint with desire, a black-letter Morte d'Arthur for which one might brave the gallows, and some missals bound and clasped and illuminated in a way that is never known now; that is, with human heart-beats, and human desire, and love, and worship. Hardwin Hall was unique, built by a millionaire of good birth, who was also a man of taste and culture.

He was standing in the brilliance and warmth of a large, lofty room on the ground floor, called the little dining-room, which had been decorated to harmonise with a service of gold plate, glittering on a carved oak sideboard, and which contained blank panels for pictures. One had just arrived and been unpacked; it was a Rossetti, its price fifteen hundred guineas. It leant against the wall beneath the blank panel it was to fill; its owner was criticising it, the first rapture of appreciation past, changing lights and distances, shading his eyes, retreating backwards with noiseless steps on the deep-piled rug, till he almost backed into the fire, a tall, fine man with blazing, restless eyes and thick snowy hair, in a dress suit of perfect fit.

A younger man, who might have been, but was not, his son, lounged in a deep chair on the other side of the fire, and contemplated the picture and its owner with a thoughtfulness that brought a frown to his clever, subtle face. He was growing bald on the forehead; he was clean-shaven, save for a moustache that half concealed and half revealed a sensuous, rather hard mouth; his was the kind of clear-cut face and pale complexion that is never old and never young. He held an open letter in his long, white hand, and glanced at it with a satisfied yet scarcely pleasant expression.

'She is still devoted to him,' he said, in a soft, rather light voice. The older man frowned on the picture and made an inarticulate sound, almost a growl.

'Devoted to that beast! Devoted to damnation!' he added, still frowning on the picture.

The younger man appeared to like the observation.

'Poor girl!' he sighed, rearranging his graceful limbs, 'but she wants money.'

'Ay! she may want, and she will want as long as he lives,' he returned in a deep voice, the deeper from its contrast with the younger man's.

Some dry branches clashed on the window, in a sudden, shrieking wind-gust that died away, emphasising the comfort of the sumptuous room by its suggestion of darkness and cold discomfort without. But the last five minutes before a delayed dinner can ruffle the rose-leaf couch and sweet temper of a millionaire; the builder and owner of Hardwin wanted his dinner badly, and it was overdue.

'But you will not suffer her to want, surely?' the soft voice deprecated.

'Is that why she writes? A begging letter? If she must beg, why not beg of me?'

'She dares not. She asks me to intercede.'

'She's a fool, and so are you.' She certainly was in this case; but he was not, and knew it too well to take umbrage. 'She's got a husband to look after her, and she's satisfied with the beast. What more would she have?'

'Wherewithal to pay his debts, I suppose. Poor Carrie!'

'Any woman with a grain of self-respect would divorce the brute. Then she might come back to me—on her knees.'

'Would you forgive her? Would you take her back?' he asked, in a voice sharpened by anxiety. 'But it could not be. There is no cruelty,' he added with his usual languor.

'Oh, cruelty! Cruelty is easy to procure,' the old man snarled. 'Get a servant to stay in the room while you nag at him when drunk—any woman can do that—and trust any man to knock her down, or at least give her a cuff.'

'Poor, dear Carrie's not that kind of woman. Besides, she worships this man. A true woman. The more he ill-treats her, the better she likes him. That's the way of women.'

'Is it? Well, don't try it on with Mrs. Brinson, that's all. Does she not dine with us to-night? No? Poor girl, herself or the baby?'

'Oh! the baby, of course,' returned Brinson with a sort of languid impatience. 'He can't be left. Benson—well! Benson has got the *die* look on his face again.'

'The deuce he has! Poor little chap! Well, Brinson, you *are* unlucky. And this little man was right enough, as sharp and bright a child—not like the others. Only a year, and speaking——'

'That's it. He shouldn't speak plain at his age. "Too much brain this time," Benson says. Pity we can't balance it. Benson orders quiet, soothing, *says* he'll come round, but looks—the old story.'

Both were silent, both thought of a remote wing of Hardwin Hall where was a special nursery, with special nurses, in which two idiot children had died and two still lived. Both remembered the surprise and joy with which the wretched parents had welcomed signs of unusual intelligence in this last bright, beautiful boy, and the great hopes they had built on him. Both remembered the despairing cry of the unfortunate mother, maddened by grief—

'There will *never* be a healthy child born in this house, never. There is a curse upon it.'

'There is a fool in it,' was her husband's suave and considerate reply; 'and like breeds like.'

But he had taken care that this last baby should be born elsewhere, in a pleasant, legend-haunted nook in the Black Forest, where all tended to mental and bodily health. The first smile of recognition in the solemn baby face, and deep inscrutable eyes, had occurred in Hardwin Hall, and convinced the mother that the curse was taken away. But this sudden sickness had destroyed her hope.

'*My* child's brain was sound enough,' Sir Geoffrey growled at last, 'and a precious treasure she's been to me!'

'Still she's happy enough. All she wants is—money. She doesn't suffer.' He crushed the letter in his slim, strong fingers, and looked darkly down as he spoke. The branches dashed drily on the window-pane, and then, close without, so near and so sudden as to startle the sensitive nerves of the two inhabitants of this Palace of Art, rose in the rough voices and burring accent of the men with the lantern—

'God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay;
Remember Christ, our Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day!'

Brinson Hythe endured the first stanza with the air of a martyred angel; he sank back smiling in his chair; the letter, still remaining in his listless hand, trailed on the carpet.

'There is a superstition,' he observed faintly, 'a very ancient superstition, to the effect that every house, every building, indeed, must have its human sacrifice. Let us murder one of these waits

and bury him under the threshold. We have had no fatal accident in the building, I think, as yet.'

'Murder the lot,' growled Sir Geoffrey; 'the more the better.'

'Nothing you dismay-hay-hay!' chanted the waits at the top of their voices, with vigorous fiddle and clarionet accompaniment, 'Nothing you-hoo dismay.'

'A curious superstition,' added Brinson dreamily; 'it ran through the Middle Ages and led to not a few tragedies. The odd thing is that so many tragedies were spontaneous—ah! accidental. A scaffolding gave way, or a piece of masonry crashed down, or some fresh-mortared wall or staging was over-weighted by a crowd. Query—Were these frequent catastrophes the origin of the superstition—making people nervous if the thing went off too well and nobody was killed—or was it a survival of sacrificial creeds?'

'Was born on Chri-ist-mas Day,' sang the waits.

'All creeds were sacrificial,' Sir Geoffrey asserted, 'particularly devil-worship. A bad power has to be propitiated. The most precious thing is human blood. There's a Hindoo deity who drinks it by the hogshead called Kali, I think. There was secret devil-worship all through the Middle Ages. That demanded human sacrifice and originated the superstition.'

The frown deepened on Brinson Hythe's face, and the sensuous mouth grew harder. 'Hardwin has had no blood yet,' he murmured, 'but—what is more precious than human blood, Uncle Geoffrey?

He looked up into the old man's blazing eyes with a complete change of expression, like one who wears a mask and suddenly drops it—pain, even agony, was in that look. Sir Geoffrey turned from it with a slight tremor, and looked frowningly at the beautiful woman about to drink from a jewelled cup in the painting. Just then melodious sounds thrilled softly through the house, rising to full accord, and dying as softly away—the sounding of fine-toned gongs with a strain of silver melody helped by treble voices, floating above, yet interwoven with the deeper, burdening notes. A two-leaved door into the grand dining-room opened its valves, as if by enchantment, disclosing a finely proportioned chamber with an arched ceiling, in the compartments of which the Rape of Persephone was painted.

The stone-ribbed ceiling was supported on porphyry pillars ranged close to the wall and dividing it into spaces, sometimes filled by a window, sometimes by tapestry, again by a bookcase, a full-length portrait, or a draped mirror. A musician's gallery ran along one end, the opposite end led into an

orangery, through the opened doors of which the scent of white blossoms floated and fruit glowed golden.

When the two men had passed in, the doors closed noiselessly behind them, a curtain ran as silently across. They dined at a small oval table before a cheerful fire; the fireplace and chimney-piece occupying a space between two pillars, the chimney-piece supported by two winged beings of white marble. The chimney-piece was made of porphyry and white marble, in the centre of which the portrait of a beautiful woman in the full dress of the First Empire occupied a medallion space, and looked at every one all the room over.

The table, as well as the room, was remarkable for an absence of flowers; the decoration, besides the fruit, consisted only of a few fir branches interspersed with berried yew, black ivy clusters, and spindle berries, because Sir Geoffrey liked to know the time of year by the flowers. The linen was hand-embroidered, the glass and china and silver artistic but not costly, the dishes were few and simple. A venerable man with a white beard, black velvet skull-cap and black velvet cassock of picturesque cut, acted as butler; two tall youths, with hair cut straight across the forehead and worn low behind, in tunics of claret-coloured velvet, the sleeves slashed with satin, cut square on the shoulders, displaying full white cambric shirts, drawn into low laced throat-bands, and wearing trunk-hose and fifteenth century shoes of soft, undyed leather, were footmen. The coffee that came later was brought in by a girl in Schwartzwald peasant costume. French was spoken while the servants were in the room. Curiously enough, Brinson Hythe spoke it more easily than English, with a fluent elegance and sparkle that few foreigners command. Sir Geoffrey spoke with ease and grammar; but his idiom, and sometimes his accent, betrayed him.

The waits had stopped to cough and tune the fiddles; their feet could be heard stamping on the gravel outside. Brinson swore in faultless French with half a hundred rolling r's, because the coughing and stamping suggested suffering and cold, which he hated even more than rough music. Then they began—

'There were three ships went sailing by,'

and Mr. Hythe swore again, because one fiddle was sharper than the other, and the singers were hoarse. The servants conceived this to be the French way of expressing satisfaction with the music.

'Of Christmas Day in the morning,' croaked the half-frozen waits.

Before the carols were ended, a pure light treble was heard in the orangery, and the graceful figure of a boy of eight, in purple velvet, point lace, and silver-buckled shoes, danced lightly into the grand dining-room, over the shining parquet, his brown, gold-edged curls floating behind him.

'The first great joy our Mary had,
It was the joy of one,'

he sang with the waits, in a round, sweet voice, with clear intonation, and, dancing up to Sir Geoffrey, lifted up his face to be kissed, then rolled his head into the old gentleman's breast, making inarticulate baby sounds.

'That will do, Pippin,' Sir Geoffrey said gently, but with a tinge of suppressed impatience. The boy raised his head with an unmeaning laugh, and danced round the table, babbling 'Dada,' and fell fondling into Brinson's arms in the same way. The furrow deepened between the man's brows; he bore the fondling passively a while, and then said—

'Come, Pippin, don't be silly.'

'Whath thilly?' lisped the child, with a vacant look.

His father took him under the shoulders, and holding him erect at arm's length before him, looked straightly and intently at him. He was a fine boy, with beautifully moulded limbs and features, large bright blue eyes and rosy cheeks, with curling hair cut straight across a fair broad forehead, that promised intellect. But the expression was that of a two years' child, gentle, affectionate, and with gleams of fitful intelligence. There was no organic failure, no malformation, no physical weakness. Why was this handsome, healthy boy not as others of the same age? His mother knew why; his father tried to forget.

'Will he *ever* come right?' the unfortunate father cried, almost unconsciously; 'surely it is only arrested development. All is so promising else.—Pippin,' he added after a while, 'try to be a *man*. You are not a baby, remember. You are—eight—years—old.'

'Eight—ers—ode,' the boy repeated, his face gradually growing more intelligent under his father's mesmeric gaze, while the laughter faded from it, and a wistful, appealing look came into the large bewildered eyes. The father thought, as he looked into the helpless, perplexed face, of the precocious baby in the house dying of brain excitement. What a pity it was not Pippin! Pippin was a nice heir for Hardwin Hall.

'What day is it?' he asked the boy.

'To-day,' was the reply.

'Upon my soul, I sometimes think he is acting and selling one,' cried Brinson, pushing him away and turning to the table. 'It is surely half wilfulness. He is spoilt beyond endurance.'

'Come to me, Pip,' said Sir Geoffrey. 'Take that chair. Come, come, don't make faces at your father. Have some grapes. There.—Well, Brinson, you wanted a Hellenic son, who would have no sense of right and wrong. And you've got one,' he added, chuckling. Brinson looked darkly at Sir Geoffrey with an inward wince.

'One! I've got three,' he replied bitterly. 'Pure Hellenes all, for that matter. Not a Hebraic mind, not a conscience, among them all.'

'You should thank Heaven you've no daughter,' snarled the old man.

'Not I. It wouldn't be so bad if Pippin were a girl. He's so utterly charming. No one can resist him. There's not a servant on the place who wouldn't die for him. His beauty, his grace, his winning ways, his curious gleams of intelligence, his helplessness, his pretty whims, all are so many fascinations.'

Pippin, apparently unconscious of these remarks, spoken in French, ate his grapes daintily, holding them up to see the light through them and the bloom upon them, with as much pleasure in their beauty as in their taste. When they were finished, he slipped from his seat and leant against Sir Geoffrey's high-backed chair, his head touching the old man's shoulder, and thrown back so that he might look at the ceiling where sweet, doomed Persephone was plucking the fateful daffodils in a pleasant meadow. Presently he began to sing, not lisping, but with distinct enunciation—

'Once on a time the wicked old world
Was a dear little laughing boy;
He played with the waves, when they rolled and curled,
But the moon was his darling toy.

Once on a time, a very long time,
There was nothing but boys and girls;
And up to gather the stars they would climb,
And dive down the sea for pearls.'

He sang sweetly, to a simple melody, scarcely more than a cadence, quite unknown to his listeners, with a rapt, happy look on his face, still turned upwards to Persephone.

'Who taught you that song, Pippin?' Sir Geoffrey asked, and

the boy, without change of expression or posture, replied in a slow, melodious chant—

'It is Pippin's song,
It is not very long,
It is not very strong—my dears!'

the last words with a roguish look, then he lapsed into one of his unmeaning laughs, as the intelligence died from his face.

'Where does he get these rhymes and cadences?' his father asked; 'they are *impromptus* undoubtedly. And yet he can't speak plain.'

'Very singular, Brinson. Sometimes I fancy it a case of perverted, not arrested, development. Rhyming, musical composition, creative imagination, coming before ordinary speech and ratiocination. Who knows but he may turn out a genius after all?'

'What is genius but abnormal development?' sighed Brinson, intently watching the boy, who was inarticulately babbling and chuckling and trying to catch prismatic lights from glass on the cloth. 'Don't—make—that—*noise*, Pippin,' he added querulously. 'Surely the boy is a changeling, an elf, a fairy child! —D'ye *hear*, boy!' he cried sharply.

Pippin trembled, cowered, and turned pale. Then, standing erect, and clasping his hands, he lifted up his voice and sang, slowly, sadly, in a high minor key, to a plaintive melody, his slim form swaying to the music—

'Far, far in fairyland,
A fairy I was born;
I waved a golden wand,
I wound a magic horn.

Far, far in fairyland,
So hushed and sweet and strange,
We floated hand in hand,
Ah! woful, woful change!

Far, far in fairyland,
With faint unearthly song,
On soft, unwrinkled sand,
Their mystic pageants throng.

Far, far in fairyland,
Their gems are proudly worn;
In darkness here I stand,
Bewildered, sad, forlorn!'

Then very slowly, almost in a wail—

'Far, far in fairyland!'

The unearthly sadness of this melody was such as sometimes sounds through dreams, rarely, even in Slav music, in waking reality; it was made up of longing, regret, pain of parting, and yearning anguish of exile. Sir Geoffrey put his hand before his face, because at the sound of the music all the sorrow of all his life rushed up and choked him. Brinson turned pale and cold, for all that he had ever imagined of the possibilities of pain was in the boy's sweet, plaintive voice. Silent, unchildlike tears rolled down Pippin's soft cheeks; the song broke off, as if from pure anguish of soul, in that long-drawn, musical wail.

There was silence for some seconds, Pippin standing alone, the picture of speechless anguish. The cheery flapping of flame in the fire, the tick of a clock, the long moaning sough of wind in trees and eerie tap of branches on window-panes, alone broke the silence. The waits had long since finished their serenade, and were being regaled with comforting spiced ale and Eccles cakes in the servants' hall.

Presently Sir Geoffrey looked up.

'Poor Pippin,' he sighed; 'poor boy!' and the child fell into his opened arms and lapsed once more to inarticulate babble. His father took some wine, more than he was accustomed to take, but not very much.

'I can't *stand* Pippin,' he cried wildly, when the boy had danced lightly away into the distance; 'he'll drive me *mad*.'

'Nonsense,' remonstrated Sir Geoffrey, 'he's a remarkable, fascinating creature. I'm proud of my great-nephew, Brin. He fits the house; he's a sort of poetic sprite; his faculties—rare faculties—still in embryo. He embodies the beauty and mournfulness of imaginative art, reflects the charm and poetry of lovely Hardwin. Hardwin is my child, my creation, the offspring of my soul, the trained and cherished pupil of a lifetime. The house is to me as his masterpiece to an artist, his greatest song to a poet. When your cousin deceived and tricked me—ungrateful Regan of a child that she was—when my only daughter turned against me, I say—I planned the great central hall, I extended my collections, and added to my treasures of art. Hardwin will never turn against me. Hardwin Hall will remain a specimen and symbol of nineteenth century art and thought for ages. You will never disperse any of my treasures, Brinson. After all, the place is almost as much your creation as mine. Your taste and imagination are in every plan and detail. You will continue to add to its beauty while you live. The Cumberland property will continue to increase in value. Curious that a busy mining

and manufacturing centre should have sprung into sudden being on those lonely acres of mine; the city grows and thrives; the mines are practically inexhaustible; if all other sources of revenue fail—which is an absurd thought—why, that property alone must furnish princely incomes.'

'And after me?' asked Brinson with suppressed anxiety.

'You may have a dozen clever sons yet, even if Reginald dies and Pippin doesn't develop. You will pass Hardwin on to the most capable, under my *conditions*, remember. There should be a peerage; but, even in that case, Hardwin should go only to the most capable, not the eldest. There are the Garennes to fall back upon in the last resort—with their peerage too. Wotton is a man of taste. But Hardwin in the hands of the beast your cousin chose to run away with. What a casting of pearls before swine!'

'A peerage would be awkward. Even if the patent specified a female succession, it couldn't come to me; it would go to Caroline and her heirs.'

'Gad! so it would. But it might *begin* with you, as my heir.'

'After all, a peerage is a hideous banality, an anachronism. It is Philistine. A new peerage is an absurdity. The antiquity and historic quality of a title alone give it distinction, especially in a day when coronets adorn the casks of bloated brewers and the bare skulls of superannuated M.P.s.'

'Peerages are no worse than trees; they have to grow; they are created for the future. As for a baronetcy, one is conscious of its absurdity. Never old enough to be impressive; always too petty to be worth transmitting to posterity. Even now I might have a male heir,' Sir Geoffrey added musingly.

Green lights leapt in Brinson's eyes. He paused before speaking and sipped some coffee, setting his cup down on a small table near at hand. They were now in the orangery, where they had taken a couple of turns before sitting on a deep-cushioned divan under the trees. Sir Geoffrey was smoking—a thing Brinson never did. He thought that it blunted artistic perception, and that a cigar in the mouth made a man look half a fool and half a beast.

'Undoubtedly you might,' he replied, in a manner that excluded personal interest in the matter. 'Still,' he added, as if by an after-thought, 'marriage is a serious undertaking; there are risks.'

'Gad! Brinson,' cried Sir Geoffrey, 'd'ye take me for a fool? I burden myself with a young wife? But I might still have a grandson.'

'Certainly, Dorrien's son,' commented Brinson thoughtfully, 'and blood is thicker than water, after all.'

'The deuce it is. I often wish that boy of Carrie's had lived. Sons take after mothers. He might have been all Harbord. For his sake she might have bitten the dust; she might have thought it worth while to ask her poor deceived father's forgiveness. For his sake she might have stood at my gates and begged for an audience of me. She might have knelt there, on that slab of marble, before me, and owned herself in the wrong, and sued to me for pardon.'

'But she didn't. The boy lived seven years. She sent you a newspaper to announce the death.'

'The beast had not squandered everything then, as, it appears, he has now. There was no question then of Eton and Oxford, as there would have been later,' urged the old man with passionate emphasis and flaming glance; 'the iron hadn't entered her soul then.'

'Or the duns her doors. She has not one penny left, poor girl; the whole of her mother's money is gone, and the whole of his father's. They live on credit. He still has expectations.'

'Well! but where is her fool of an aunt's money?'

'Oh! nicely tied up. They have the interest of that for her life, of course; so her girls will not be penniless. "Handsome girls," she says, "the image of their esteemed father."'

Sir Geoffrey muttered a deep curse.

'What shall I say in reply for you?' Brinson asked.

'Nothing. She is nothing to me. I have no daughter. I 'm a wretched, childless old man, deserted, deceived, plotted against, forsaken, by the ungrateful, heartless viper I cherished in my bosom. She even plots and schemes and begs in this roundabout, backstairs fashion for the money she wants. Want of money is the only thing that reminds her she once had a father—a fond, foolish father who—who—who lived for her and lavished affection and luxuries and pleasures upon her. Yet she can't bow her cursed pride, yet she can't even ask me for money in a straightforward way. Oh! she's crooked, crooked! She must needs crawl up to you and whine to you to get on the weak side of the old fool who trusted her and was deceived. She must needs flaunt her affection for her beast of a husband in my face. Not a sign of repentance; not a trace of filial feeling; not a jot of filial respect! What little heart she has, all squandered on Dorrien and his hateful brats!'

'Human nature,' sighed Brinson. 'Love goes downward for the

good of the race, it seems. A man shall leave his father and mother—much more a woman. Poor Carrie! after all, she has all a woman ever really wants—an adored husband, and two pretty daughters exactly like him. And Aunt Adelaide's money is settled on them; he can't spend that.'

'All she wants, the ungrateful viper,' continued the old man; 'ay, and much more than she deserves. Oh yes! *she* is happy enough, else she would repent and come back to her poor deceived father. That's the world's way, Brinson. The selfish and heartless are always happy—they always have what they want. Let her suffer, heartless jade! Let her brats turn against her, as she turned against me. Let her get tired of the oaf she fancied—he soon got tired of her—ha! ha! ha! Then she might think of her poor deserted father. Say no more of that unfeeling woman, Brinson. Money indeed! Money for Dorrien's vices! Pour money into the London sewers if you like—but don't waste it on Caroline Dorrien. Don't speak her cursed name to me, I tell you. I won't have the sound of it in my house, I say.'

'*Les absents ont toujours tort*,' sighed Brinson, with a deprecatory wave of his slim white hands.

'Confound you, Brinson Hythe, you are a good-hearted fellow. You always stood up for her, and it shows a good heart. Was I ever harsh to that ungrateful Goneril? Did I ever deny that serpent one pleasure, one small gratification? Didn't I begin Hardwin for her sake? Wasn't I mother and father and brother and sister to her in one?'

'There was never a kinder, more indulgent father, sir.'

'And yet you want me to rob myself for the sake of her beast of a husband and his hateful brats. Hold your tongue and don't contradict me in my own house, Brinson Hythe. Love going downwards! I wonder how that poor baby of yours is. Better dead, poor thing, for all we know, better dead. Pippin will be all right; he'll be a genius.'

Sir Geoffrey paused from weariness. The fierce flame in his angry eyes sank, his massive head drooped, his strong hands hung limp, his features softened; he sank back in the deep cushions with a heavy sigh, observed closely by his nephew, whose attitude and features bespoke the utmost deference, while his moustache concealed a faint, strange smile.

'Still,' said the old man gently, after a while, 'she may still repent. She may still come back—even now.' He turned his face away, and hastily brushed off a furtive tear. Brinson Hythe

looked down on the rug beneath his feet, the faint smile fled, a spasm passed over his face. He pondered with grave eyes and frowning brow; he wished half his life unlived.

The old man's helpless anger, piteous grief, and wistful, lingering hope made a painful spectacle. Had Brinson's wife, the weak, good woman who daily fed his scorn, been right when she said there was a curse on that house? Pippin's vacant laugh and baby prattle rang through his father's brain with the long-drawn wail of homesick yearning, "Far, far in fairyland." Are the rulers of human destiny just, after all, then?

The good moment passes so swiftly. Brinson looked up, and his eyes met those of a servant coming quickly to him.

'Well?' he asked sharply.

'Mrs. Hythe begs you to come to Master Reginald at once, sir.'

He sprang to his feet and went at once without a word.

The solitary lantern twinkled among the trees in the darkness outside, flinging weird shadows on frozen grass; the waits wound downwards to their homes in the village much more briskly than they had wound upwards, their tongues set going by the good cheer.

'Eh! but yon lile lad can sing,' said one. 'Fowk say 'tis nobbut an innocent.'

Snowflakes began to fall, dashing weather-beaten faces, enclosing all in solemn silence; the lantern twinkled into the village, and the village lights twinkled out into the muffled darkness of the snowy night.

CHAPTER II

SIR GEOFFREY slowly followed upon his nephew's swift steps through the orangery and back into the grand dining-room, where he stopped and looked earnestly at the portrait over the chimney-piece.

'Is the child worse?' he had asked of the servant who brought the message, and the man's reply had been that the child was a little better. 'Ah! then he will be well,' the old man reflected; 'children die or get better in the twinkling of an eye.' Shading his eyes with his hands, he looked at the speaking face of the beautiful young woman who had been his wife, and whose young bloom and grace, embalmed by the witchery of art, was unchanged by time. When he looked thus into the responsive, vivid face of the young beauty, the years rolled away, sorrow and loss

vanished, youth returned. The warm, crimson lips seemed to move, their smile was alive, they were surely about to speak. Massive as some old, unruined tower, firmly planted on his feet, he stood in the warm brilliance, his grey head slightly raised, his blazing, restless eyes, his youngest feature, shadowed; what had that old man in common with that sweet, young creature?

'Grace,' he said, very softly yet audibly, 'Grace! why did you go? Can you really—really be gone?'

Surely, surely, she must reply at last to the impassioned lover gazing into the beautiful laughing eyes. The white breast rises softly, the triple row of pearls gleam as the breath rocks them, the eyes flash; but, ah! no sound issues from the parting, never parted, lips, nor ever will. He cannot believe that earth lies, and has lain, nearly forty mortal years on that vivid face, that spiritual, love-filled gaze, those sweet yet firm, half-mocking lips. Oh! that mouth, tender and witty, warm and pure, sensuous but never sensual, kind, with dimples of exquisite humour, silent all those long years; but eloquent once—oh, so eloquent with love and mirth and gentle wisdom, that knew how to 'warn, to comfort, and command.'

Down there, in the quiet churchyard, all those long, lonely years, the sunny head still and dark beneath the flowered turf, by the white marble cross that caught the dawn-glow and the first sunbeam all the year round,—down there, with the once imperious hands meekly folded on the hushed breast, she had lain through the storm and sun and frost of thirty-eight years. Yet her lover stood before her picture, his heart flooded with young passion and young longing, the thick, dark, curling hair she had known, whitened and thinned, the shoulders not bowed, the fiery eyes undimmed, the figure erect and strong—but the face world-worn, the mouth hardened, the heart corroded with anger and wrong, the hands wrinkled and darkened, the temper embittered. Yet on this wintry night Lady Grace's lover and husband gazed with the look no mortal had seen for nearly two-score years, the look she alone had known—a look transfiguring even to a young face, much more to an old one. She would not have known the old man's habitual expression had she returned to life, so changed it was by the stress of life and thought; but this look had been well known and well prized by her, the very wistfulness of its vain yearning had been in that of the young wooer.

'Your child deserted me,' he sighed; 'our child, our only child, turned and left me desolate in my age.' Had the mother lived, things would have been different; the mother would have kept the

daughter's heart. It was hard, hard on him, widowed in youth, childless in age. So he thought; but it did not strike him that it might have been even harder on the daughter, the motherless girl who had but himself to guide and protect her. No; he was a bitterly wronged man, his child cruel and ungrateful. He had loved so truly and fervently in youth that his passion woke and mourned in age, unquenched by the long, unbroken silence of death. Her love was strong enough to bridge that abysmal gulf of years, yet it was monstrous to him that such love and longing should be strong enough to steal away the daughter's heart in her springtime; and yet he would bate no jot of his hatred for the man who had won her and stolen her away. Why should a daughter and heiress, an only child, leave a devoted and worshipping father, who denied her nothing, and made her mistress of all he had? This he could not understand. That she should marry eventually was indeed desirable; but he was the proper person to choose a husband in due time, a suitable husband, fit to found a family and carry out all his schemes and ambitions, and inherit his great possessions—a man of taste, culture, and energy, as well as of good birth and breeding, whose name, if ancient enough, might have been doubled with his, and if not, exchanged. He had denied her no whim, never curbed her will, yet was amazed when she grew up headstrong; parents always are.

If Brinson had but been his son and Carrie his niece. Brinson was perfect, his name his only fault. Had he only been a Harbord instead of a Hythe, a brother's, not a sister's child. Yet the blood was the same; there was more affinity between himself and the loyal, devoted Brinson than between himself and the disloyal, rebellious Carrie. Disloyal! Oh, the sting of it! The scheming, intriguing, plotting, the underhand dealing that must have gone on, unsuspected, before that sad day dawned when he found no daughter; and, gradually and painfully unravelling the mystery, was finally enlightened by a letter from Clarence Dorrien's wife. What treason is equal to domestic treason? 'Your child!' he sighed to the silent, eloquent face; 'our child, our only child!' He could not quite forget that his daughter alone was of the same blood as his wife, and there were moments when conscience made him excuse himself by accusing his dead wife of having brought that monster of treachery into the world. 'Why did you leave me so early?' he mourned, thinking of unborn sons. 'Why?'

With a farewell salutation, he turned from the lovely lady, whose long-buried youth and beauty and eager spirit animated the whole room, and even added a subtle poignancy to the painted

history of sweet Persephone and her mourning mother, and, parting the heavy door-curtains, went into the little dining-hall and sat by the fire opposite the newly-arrived picture of the beautiful woman about to drink from her jewelled cup.

Fixing his eyes upon the picture with an unseeing glance, he thought and remembered. The fair woman with deep hair and tower-like throat had turned from the jewelled cup she held, with lifted chin, curled lips, and a singular glance, half mockery, half invitation, wholly mysterious. Was she embodied youth and beauty about to pledge disappointed age, sitting grey and sad before her? or was she a temptress, proffering in the raised goblet a Circean draught potent to steep sad memories in forgetfulness, renew youth, and thread aged veins with young desire and hope? He gazed and gazed; but his piercing glance saw far beyond the lovely lady with her lifted cup, carven eyelids, inviting eyes, and flower-decked hair. It saw youth and love and hope. It saw a sweet bride, loving and loved; then it saw a pale, frail young mother, with her first-born child in her arms, a girl babe, that the young mother grieved over because it was not a son, while the young father cheered her. 'Better so,' he said, 'the boys would come later.' But instead of boys came death, with a still-born son lying waxen white on the mother's stilled heart, a great darkness and desolation, and a green grave down there in the quiet churchyard, a grave that filled and darkened all his world. Then the darkness was broken by the gleam of a golden head, sweet blue eyes and baby prattle. Sometimes he caught the mother's eyes and smile in the dimpling child face. What is sweeter, what more winning, than a pretty, intelligent girl of two years? Small wonder that the little child became the widowed father's idol.

The lovely lady continued to offer her tempting cup in vain; the old man gazed on through and through her, as if in the depths of a magic mirror, seeing the wilful, wayward child grow into a wilful, wayward woman, quick and clever and gay, often tiresome, always charming. That was long and long ago, and it was long and long ago since he had seen her bright, piquant face. Later he heard the whole story, where the lovers met, what was their code of signals. Heard that, when the frank-faced girl who rode by his side stopped and found fault with her saddle-girths, it meant one thing; when she held her riding-whip so or so, lifted or dropped her veil, it meant another; that when, at the cover-side, she bowed distantly to young Dorrien, whose raised hat was the only sign he gave of being aware of her presence, their flight in all its details was already arranged.

That his heart did not break under this treachery and bitter disillusion was due to Brinson Hythe—loyal, unselfish Brinson. How he had stood by him, borne with him, cared for him, tried to soften his bitter anger. 'She is your child, Uncle Geoffrey, your only child.'—'The only thing is to make the best of it; you can't unmarry them.'—'Carrie is not worse than others: all's fair in love and war.'—'When a girl is head over ears in love, what can you expect?'—'Besides, she knows that she cannot do wrong in your eyes.'—'What woman ever lived that did not love forbidden fruit?'

Yes, Brinson always stood up for Carrie and fought her battles through thick and thin. What son could have been half what Brinson had been to him? Poor Brinson, with his tragic progeny of witless, brainsick babes; noble Brinson, who put aside his own sorrows to cheer and comfort the age of a lonely, childless man, and tried so hard to reconcile father and daughter; gifted Brinson, whose tastes and aptitudes chimed so well with his own.

In the magic mirror of memory he saw a group of musicians: the golden head of his young daughter by the pillar of a harp; Brinson, gallant, gay, and young, with piano or violoncello, himself drawing a skilful bow across a violin; or it would be a quartette, with the stately presence and cultivated touch of his sister Adelaide on piano or harp; or the cousins' young voices blending in such an air as '*La ci darem la mano.*'

A hale, hearty old man, but old, and one cannot live for ever, he was ready to concede much if she would but begin and save his dignity and self-will. He could not leave the world at enmity with his only child. 'Oh, Carrie!' he thought, 'why don't you *come*? Why don't you steal in at this Christmas time, and just say to your lonely, deceived old father, "I was wrong, forgive me?" Only that, my girl, and bygones should be bygones. I might even meet your beast of a husband—once a year perhaps—when there would probably be a shindy,' Sir Geoffrey reflected. 'An injured father can't be expected to sue to his disobedient child. It's improper. But she has no heart. How well she played and sang—and rode—and danced—and entertained people—and conversed—ay, and outwitted her wretched father!'

He rose and paced the room; the Christmas carols in the waits' raucous, rough voices, and Pippin's unearthly, musical wail, repeated themselves in his brain, waking old associations and mournful reflections. Even want of money could not drive the rebellious daughter to her father; she could humble herself to Brinson, but not to her father.

The children were all sleeping; even the sick baby was at rest

in his mother's arms at last; snow beat with soft crackle on the window-panes; Sir Geoffrey paused in his restless walk to pick up a crumpled paper that he had kicked more than once from his path in his nervous irritation. It was the letter that Brinson had crushed and thrown at the fire before dinner. He was a bad shot; it had fallen short. Sir Geoffrey threw the paper into the burning grate; it unfolded in the heat before a sudden flame licked it up, and he saw, with preoccupied glance, in the momentary blaze, portions of half-burnt lines—'dear Brinson—father—life-long friendship—melancholy necessity'—and, in the last leap of the dying blaze, 'Most affectionately yours, Caroline Dorrien.'

He seized the poker and viciously dashed the fluttering black ash into the heart of the fire with a muttered imprecation. So we often blindly destroy what is meant for our healing and peace.

A few moments later a storm of music was rolling from the organ in the great central hall. Sir Geoffrey's hands were on the manuals, his feet on the pedals; every muscle of his body and every fibre of his brain was in that stormy mingling of contrapuntal discords modulating into harmonies. It sounded through the dining-rooms and broke, soft as ocean foam, in the orangery, sounded all over the ground floors of the central tower and wings; but in the sleeping-rooms and nurseries it was scarcely heard, only as the far-off murmur of breakers on an unseen shore, or pleasant lullaby of wind in pinetops.

To Brinson Hythe, in his study on a first floor, it came like distant forest murmurs in a storm, pleasantly and too lightly to break the idlest reverie; it rushed in billowy surge through the small dining-room, where the lovely lady, looking at the fire with its faint remnant of fluttering paper ash, seemed to pause in the act of drinking a pledge from her costly cup, to listen and smile at some strange thing.

Brinson remembered the contents of the burnt letter perfectly. He wrote leisurely, sometimes pausing to dream and smile softly at pictures that passed before his mind's eye. Many things he loved in life and enjoyed; but the thing he most loved and enjoyed was a supplicating letter from his cousin.

'Dear Carrie,' he wrote in a fine clear hand of exquisite finish, 'I am so very sorry to hear what a fix you are in. I only wish it were in my power to help you.' It was very pleasant to pen that phrase and contrast it with phrases of former days, when he was the suppliant and she the supplicated: 'What, did you never hear of Bottom and the Ass's Head?'—'My good cousin, that history is never old.'—'Do get up, you can't think how insane you look on your

marrow-bones.'—'Care for you? Care killed the cat. Nothing seems to kill donkeys.'—'Hear you? Why, the whole village might hear.'—'Heartless, cruel, am I?'—'If you torment me any more, I shall tell papa to send you packing.' Such were some of the flowers of speech issuing from the lips of a headstrong girl in her teens, merry and heartless as a schoolboy or a colt. But men expect raw girls to act like finished women. Brinson felt each unconsidered quip and flout as a calculated, poisoned sting, piercing to the heart's core, felt them burnt into him with ineffaceable scars, felt and heard them after all these years. And even more keenly he felt the refusal of the grown woman, tamed, civilised, and polished by life and social intercourse. It was polite, cold, absolutely final. 'If you wish to preserve my esteem, this distasteful subject must never again be alluded to.'

There are men who cannot take a refusal, cannot forgive a woman for seeing, much less causing, their mortification and disappointment. In this case a genuine passion for a beautiful and charming girl was combined with a keen appreciation of the position of an heiress and a great distaste for the labour of procuring an income sufficient for his needs, which were large. The wheel of Fortune had now completely turned; Brinson Hythe was the adopted son and heir, Caroline was Caroline Dorrien, stranger and suppliant. It had just been decided that he was to add the name of Harbord to his own, the necessary legal forms were being completed, he could now sign himself Brinson Hythe-Harbord. Delightful!

'I have tried,' the letter continued, 'to soften him; but I fear that my efforts have, as usual, only irritated. There are things, my dear cousin, that can never be altered. The better, the wiser, plan is to accept finalities. My uncle's character is cast in iron. You cannot know him as I do, who have passed so many years of mature life with him. You were still young when you left him. Nothing moves Sir Geoffrey from his purpose; this is realised by every member of the household. A man of strong and deep feelings, a good lover, but also a good hater. He is strongly attached to my sons, who esteem their grandfather, as they call him, as a refuge beyond their father. I hope they will realise as they grow older that it is possible to incur his unpardonable displeasure. You thank me in your charming letter for past good offices in smoothing the way to your marriage; but, with all due deference to your husband, I must confess that my conscience sometimes reproaches me for

having made that marriage possible, when I see how completely it has alienated your father from you. But surely you overrate my services in those days. Galeotto, as you did me the honour of calling me, was an unmerited title. Since you ask my advice, I would humbly suggest that you should wait, and avoid re-opening old wounds and irritating my uncle. Your poor boy might have softened the old man's heart had he lived. How deeply I feel for your loss! I, too, have lost a son, as you know. Philip is a fine boy of his age; he is not quite eight; he is considered very like Sir Geoffrey. Reginald still counts his age by months; he is a little too quick and clever for so young a child, but very healthy. I wish I could show you my sons, dear Carrie; and how much I should like to see your girls, particularly the youngest, who must indeed be pretty if she resembles you! Kind regards from my wife—who really grows younger and prettier every day of her life. Remembrances to Dorrien, and deepest regrets for my inability to serve you and yours, either in a pecuniary way or otherwise.

'*P.S.*—I will send you shortly some photographs of the Hall, together with a catalogue of our works of art. You will be surprised to see how the place has grown. It is to be described in the *Art Journal* next month, I believe. We are thinking of rebuilding, or at least embellishing and enlarging, St. Aubyn's next summer.'

While he wrote, one of the nurses in the remote, unvisited nursery was looking at the two idiot children sleeping in their cots.

'I do think,' she said to her subordinate, as she turned away, 'they look dreadfuller asleep than awake.'

Poor Pippin, in his sumptuous, dim-lighted nursery, looked like an angel, his round arms flung out, his curls tossed carelessly over the pillow. But his lips often moved with strange babble, sometimes he laughed and sometimes moaned in his sleep. Or he would wake with a shriek of terror, or croon himself to sleep with a song—

'Far, far, in fairyland,
She waits, the elfin queen,
By fairy pinions fanned
With song from choirs unseen.'

Firemen, shod with felt and furnished with dark lanterns, perambulated the house all night long. They heard the soft crackle of snow on window-panes, tick of clocks, skitter of mice, breath of sleepers, cracking and moaning of woodwork, nothing

more. One other alone waked and watched—the children's mother, a pale, fair woman, with scared eyes, drawn face, and drooping mouth. She sat, the long night through, with little Reginald in her arms, sleeping at last, after nights and days of restless, delirious waking. The pale, pretty face, haloed with soft curls, moved only with the rise and fall of her breath. So motionless she sat, she would not even have the dying fire mended, lest the sound should wake the boy, shrouded warmly in her arms; the chill grew and grew towards morning, and helped her, with her constrained attitude, to keep awake, hollow-eyed, haggard, and blue-lipped, until the welcome day broke cold and frosty.

Mrs. Dorrien would scarcely have recognised, in this worn and weary woman, aged before her time, the picture drawn of her by the fond husband. No one seeing her in the hard light of that snowy morning could suppose that Mrs. Hythe had ever had any claim to beauty. Yet she had been justly admired before her marriage; her portrait as Una with the lion had adorned the walls of Burlington House, and hung even now in a gallery at Hardwin, where new acquaintances never recognised it. Sweet, meek, bashful and blushful, was the slim, shrinking girl figure, with a reserve of happy innocent mirth in the blue eyes, just seen beneath their drooped lids, blonde and early Victorian, in scanty drapery and prim, straight-banded hair. The picture was ten years old; the original, at an age when happy matrons bloom out into the full promise of budding maidenhood, and before there is danger of a too sumptuous overbloom, was an image of wasting despair, so thin that her garments could not be made to sit properly, with fine lines netted about eyes, mouth, and forehead, and that strange, scared look that startled people on first seeing her. Some people said that her wits had been frightened out of her by her husband's brilliance and the intellectual atmosphere in which she lived. With no disease, she was never well; it seemed as if the slightest touch must break the last frail link holding soul to body.

Yet a keen pang of jealousy shot through Mrs. Dorrien's heart when she read next day her cousin's description of the woman who reigned in her stead in her father's house. She remembered the picture of Una with the lion; it had inspired her with both envy and pity—envy, half conscious and not virulent, of her youthful charm and hope; pity, because she saw how deeply that soft, warm, dependent nature needed tenderness, guidance, and love. Her few years of wifely experience had taught her how

natures in need of cherishing suffer in marriage, unless with exceptional men. A vision of Una's budding promise fully bloomed rose before her as she read; she sighed and looked up from the paper at her own reflection in a mirror on the wall.

There she saw a worn and troubled face, with features that nothing could rob of beauty and distinction; eyes that had known many tears without having lost their magic; an imperious, sensuous mouth, somewhat hardened by sordid cares and deep sorrow; abundant hair, streaked with grey; a slender, elastic form—the picture of a woman scarred from the battle of life, but undaunted and unvanquished. Tears sprang to her eyes at the allusion to her only son; it was strange that Brinson did not know how that must hurt her. With that boy died not only the idolised son, but the best chance of regaining both a father's affection and the heritage of his almost fabulous wealth. Brinson's Philip was eight, her Geoffrey had been only seven, and her cousin had this bright little Reginald; it was *very* hard.

Sounds of children's laughter and merry treble voices fell on her ear; she glanced out of the window, which gave on a garden, to see her two girls dance by, their faces rosed by frost, their curls floating from the prim bonnets children wore in '51. Grace was fourteen, Laura not quite twelve; Grace dark and daring, Laura fair and gentle; lost Geoffrey would have been thirteen. They were girls to kindle a mother's pride, Grace already compelling dangerous admiration and masculine homage. Their mother would have given both of them for lost Geoffrey.

'And it would serve you right, mother, if both of us died this minute,' flashed out Grace one day, when her mother's much dwelling on the loss had irritated her; whereupon she received a sound and impressive box on the ear, and very nearly returned it.

'You would never cry for *me*,' she shouted in revenge; 'you would for Laura though. Nobody but poor old Dad would cry for me. He 'd cry his poor old eyes out,' added the undaunted rebel, at which poor old Dad coming into the room—a fine, handsome dragoon with scarce a thread of grey in his hair—laughed boisterously.

'Don't give your old Dad the chance, Gracie, that 's all,' he said. 'Why, what 's the matter with your face and ear, child; they 're as red as fire?'

'Nothing—larks,' she replied, giving him a great hug, and then dancing out of the room, crying bitterly as soon as she was out of sight.

At fourteen there was no more boxing of ears, but an armed

neutrality rather than peace, an occasional confinement to the room on prison diet, many an act of daring disobedience, many an insolent reply, many a turbulent scene.

'If I was a disobedient, spoilt child, and if I crossed my father and made him unhappy, Mursell,' Mrs. Dorrien said one day, 'I am amply punished in having such a troublesome daughter as Grace.'

Mursell had been Carrie Harbord's maid, had aided and abetted the clandestine marriage, and followed the changed fortunes of her young mistress; therefore Mursell said plainer things to Mrs. Dorrien than others dared.

'Miss Greecie is no favourite of yours, Missie,' she replied from her vantage post behind her mistress, as she brushed and coiled her splendid hair. 'You were disappointed she wasn't a boy, and you never forgave her.'

'You are impertinent, Mursell; how *dare* you use such language to me!'

'Eh! but I dare say the truth and shame the devil, who but I? Ye were a lile lassie, Missie dear, when first I knew ye, and never a whimsy of yours crossed.—Pearls to-night?—Nay, 'tis the high Harbord spirit in Miss Greecie, and that not so easy to curb. 'Tis a fine, high-hearted lass, ye should be proud of.'

'You take advantage of your long service, Mursell. Leave the room.'

'Nay, dearie, but I canna. Plague take this new French hair cwoifer! There! there! and the master ready and the kerriage at the door.'

Poor 'Miss Greecie' would have been quite content had Nature accorded her the more fortunate sex; she held it doubly hard to be a girl and to be misprized for not being a boy as well. 'But,' as she observed early in life to her father, 'being born a girl is a misfortune that never can be got over, at least in this world. Still, Daddie,' she asked one day, 'don't you think that girls good enough to go to heaven might be turned into boy angels?' —a problem the gallant dragoon found himself unable to solve. 'It seems hardly worth while to be good on the chance,' she added, with a morality that even that easy man felt to be dubious.

She never quite understood the circumstances attending her brother Geoffrey's death. But at the age of eight, when it occurred, she realised fully that her mother was never the same afterwards, also that in some dim way her father was held blameable for the loss. She had memories of great and strange personal

suffering and fretting, of being unusually naughty, and of a sudden stop to punishments, followed by indulgences that had no charm to stay a misery so acute, then of long darkness and bad dreams. Then a strange, peaceful waking, Mursell and her father often near her, her head shorn. But where was her mother? where the children? They were ill too, she learned. Later on a pale little sister in a black frock came to her and played languidly; then a pale, stern mother came, and wept at her cry for 'little brother' and left her. Then Mursell's weeping communication that Geoffrey was 'gone to heaven' followed, and was succeeded by great wonderment, and the experience, so strange to a child, of a missing face and irrecoverable loss. But how was her father to blame for this?

Mrs. Dorrien, seeing in the mirror herself, and her children playing in the garden, while she mused on the answer to the letter burnt at Hardwin, felt that the world was too much for her; her spirit was broken at last. Yet it was an old, old bitterness; her cousin's letters always cut her to the heart. Those Hythe children called Sir Geoffrey grandfather, and they were all boys. *We* are thinking of rebuilding St. Aubyn's, her own St. Aubyn's, where she had planned and laid out gardens, shrubberies, and parks, and talked of rebuilding. She 'would not know Hardwin,' probably not; would Hardwin or any one there know her? It seemed as if some malignant spirit had barbed Brinson's phrases especially to hurt her. Poor Brinson! he had had his turn of suffering in youth. Did he suspect the runaway match was not perfectly happy? What marriage is? Her husband had spent three fortunes, as every one knew, but a man may spend ten fortunes and yet be the idol of his hearth. Surely Brinson must know that Miss Harbord's money was securely tied up and settled on herself and children; it was true that Clarence was embarrassed, she was naturally anxious to free him. Yet Brinson wrote as if money and not her father's forgiveness and affection were the chief thing.

Never again would she expose herself to such pain and mortification; she would write no more to her cousin; to write to her father was to have the letter returned. What if that whisper had some foundation—that the Hythe children were not as they should be. Her health was on the wane; she could no longer control her feelings as of old; the thought that it was not too late for an heir brought the slow tears to passionate weeping, in the midst of which Major Dorrien came in humming a gay song, which broke off with a bad word.

'By George, Carrie, this is a lively house,' he cried. 'Time enough to be dead when you die; for pity's sake be alive while you live.'

'It is not death but life, Clarence,' she replied, giving him the letter. 'Read that. And please try to bear with me. I left all for you.'

'Well, my dear,' said the honest gentleman, after perusing the letter and tossing it into the grate, 'if the old man were to give us half he possesses to-day, I daresay I should spend it all in a couple of years. Wait till I try this new system at Homburg. I never yet knew anything bettered by crying, Carrie. After all's said and done, you've got the man you wanted and the two prettiest girls in the kingdom.'

'I ought indeed to be thankful,' she replied, with a singular emphasis.

'Cheer up, Carrie,' he added, giving her a kiss—rare tenderness, evoking fresh tears. 'Why should we owe anything to your father or anybody else? We won't be paupers, old lady, not we. I can easily mortgage the Grange; that's the card I've been keeping dark. Just look out of the window at little Dis-grace Jove, what a leap! She cleared the fence like a bird. Only wait till Miss Dis-grace is a couple of years older, and send her to her grandfather with the news that there's another to follow—for Laurie's a pretty little girl in her quiet way. If Dis-grace doesn't storm the old man's heart—well! well!—Nothing like independence, my dear. I must get a staff appointment and economise. Nothing like independence,' repeated the gallant Major as he walked out of the room, reflecting that it would be a pity to give up his four-in-hand, or his hunters, or anything just at present.

CHAPTER III

AT the age of nineteen little Dis-grace had reached such noble stature that the adjective could only be used ironically. She had had two London seasons and been in many scrapes. Slender, supple, and quick of movement, she suggested some splendid wild feline creature, vivid and untameable. Men raved about her; women censured her. She rode and danced in those antique, mid-century days, when tennis, golf, and bicycling still lay dark and unimagined in the womb of futurity, and when even the mild, unmuscular croquet was yet to spring to the front and knock the first rivet from the shackles that bound womanhood,

with a skill and grace that could scarcely be matched in our own athletic days; she could also boat and skate with any man. The New Woman (who came in with Mother Eve) was then known as a Fast Woman. Miss Dorrien was called fast. It was considered fast to turn the hair from the face *à l'Impératrice*, like the Empress Eugénie, fast to wear a small pork-pie hat, still faster to tip that small hat to one side, fast to tuck the hands cosily in the jacket pockets, fast to use slang,—all these enormities were perpetrated by Miss Dorrien, with many others besides. They pleased her father, angered her mother, and shocked little Laura, the gentlest, most timid of blonde maidens. It was rumoured that Grace Dorrien smoked and swore. But a first cigar had made her so unwell, and her objection to tobacco-stained teeth and breath was so decided, that she had not tried a second. Nor did she feel the need to swear, for when angry she could express herself with an acid sarcasm that burnt into people. It may be that taste, feeling, and even a love of beauty had some influence upon her.

Ladies' skirts, according to prints of the period, began to expand bell-wise at the Queen's Accession; they continued to expand until they reached the greatest circumference possible for a human being to carry about and move in, under the reign of the Empress Eugénie, whose body, from the waist downwards, was imprisoned in a bell-tent some yards in diameter, framed of steel, and covered with woven stuffs. It was just possible for a woman, under exceptionally favourable circumstances, to look well in these bell-tents; her upper half then appeared to float on undulating masses of drapery. It was also possible for artists to idealise these waves of billowy millinery and produce charming effects. A bevy of fashionable females offered endless combinations of flowing line, the total effect of which was a sea of ballooning flounces, dotted with islands of women cut off at the waist, and just able, by bending, to reach each other's hands. But the blank, uncompromising records of photography show crinoline in its native hideousness—a swinging steel skeleton bell, always bulging in the wrong place, always showing its bones, and clumsily hung with ungainly stuffs, from the top of which struggled the bust and shoulders of an imprisoned, ill-dressed female, to whom no one graceful posture was possible.

This costume was so frightful, so inconvenient, so indecent, and so dangerous, especially to the wearers—many of whom were burnt alive, hung up, and thrown down and destroyed by it—that it lasted in its worst form from the Crimean War till after the foundation of the German Empire.

Grace Dorrien extended her skirts to the farthest fashionable limits, and yet contrived to look well. She upset fewer chairs and tables, swept fewer hats out of church, stepped less frequently on her own and other women's balloons in dancing, hung herself up in alighting from carriages and boats, crossing stiles and going downstairs, and destroyed fewer things in shops, drawing-rooms, and halls, than any other girl of her age and circumference. Her voluminous skirts broke and entangled scarcely anything but the hearts of male mankind; these she swept off in shoals. She could do many other things—drive a four-in-hand, act impromptu charades, and in private theatricals, mimic people, sing and play on piano and harp and guitar, also on a comb and a Jew's harp; at whistling she could give points to any street boy and beat him. It was about this date that Colonel Dorrien overheard some careless club talk, in which the name Jack Dorrien frequently occurred.

'What Dorrien do you mean?' he asked from behind a paper, to the consternation of the talkers. 'My brother, Jack Dorrien, went down in the *Sea-lark* five years ago.'

No one was able to reply. The subject was changed; but with such palpable embarrassment, that the good Colonel, not the most observant of men, perceived it, and spoke of it at table next day.

'How very green you are, Daddy dear,' commented his first-born tranquilly, 'not to know that they meant *me*.'

''Gad! Gracie,' he cried, 'you can't mean that! You don't mean that you are nicknamed and made the talk of men at clubs and mess-rooms?'

'What girl isn't?' she returned, unabashed. 'What else have those empty heads to talk about except horses, dogs, and cards? What fibs were they telling about poor Jack Dorrien, Daddy?'

'By Jove!' he cried, tearing at his heavy moustache, 'this is too much of a good thing.'

'What can you expect, Clarence?' observed Mrs. Dorrien bitterly. 'You encourage her in everything, and then wonder at the consequences.'

'I am quite sure that I have no nickname. Men don't talk about me,' commented Laura virtuously.

'Nobody accused you of it, Miss Prim,' her sister replied cheerfully; 'men don't talk nursery at their clubs.'

'Confound it all,' cried poor paterfamilias; 'I'm not a Methodist; nobody can call me Puritanical; but I'll be—ah!—hanged if I like to hear men publicly calling my daughter Jack Dorrien.'

'You shouldn't listen, dear, and you wouldn't hear it,' his

daughter reproved. 'Don't hide behind newspapers again. Nobody would say it to your face.'

'You are past praying for, utterly reckless and wilful,' cried her mother angrily. 'It would not matter so much for your own sake. If you choose to destroy yourself, it is your own affair. But this poor, dear child, only just out, and associated with a fast sister, a *Jack Dorrien*! It is cruel, cruel!'

'Gruel, gruel, and milk and water,' mimicked the rebel, stung by the bitter emphasis on the 'Jack Dorrien.'

'Listen to your mother, Jack,' added her father, who had bestowed the name upon her. 'Think what hard lines it is on Laurie, and give up all this nonsense. Try to—to—well—to be *good*.'

'Oh, Daddy, for goodness' sake don't come the heavy father,' retorted Miss Graceless, seizing him by the waist and waltzing him round the room; 'it's not your *métier;* you are too old to play new parts.'

'Old, indeed,' angrily spluttered the captive. 'Let me go, Jack—you young scoundrel—let me go, I say!'

'There, then, don't do it any more. Good little papas never behave in that way,' said the naughty girl, depositing him breathless in a chair, where his wrath ended, as usual, in a laugh. 'Oh yes, mother, we know all that. Say you hate me and have done with it. Laurie does all the family goodness—she does it to death—and I have to trim the boat with a little cheerful vice. Ta-ta, darlings! I'm off to the stables,' she added, catching up a small hat, setting it to one side on her glossy head, and walking off, whistling mellifluously.

'What *is* to become of her?' moaned her mother. 'Laurie dear, you will be late to your singing lesson. Run away.'

'Poor little Disgrace,' her father commented. 'Well, my dear, I should not wonder if she were to marry some fine day. She might marry anybody she chose—a fascinating little puss! You can't be angry with her whatever she does; she does it in such a way.'

About this time the Dorriens were passing some weeks by the sea. Their house looked across a common to the water, where beautiful old wooden line-of-battle ships passed or showed at anchor just within the harbour. They were dining in a bay-windowed front room, whence the life and movement of the common were visible and the boom of the sunset gun audible. The guests were regretting the absence of the eldest daughter.

'She looks so perfectly healthy and is so full of life, and yet suffers from these cruel headaches?'

'Few girls escape headaches,' Mrs. Dorrien replied acidly; 'with Grace they are hereditary.'

Twilight was gathering heavily in a room on the third floor, with the same aspect as the dining-room, but with a small, much-curtained window, admitting little light. The room was bare of all but necessary bedroom furniture, yet it contained, in addition to a fine, healthy young woman, a tray furnished with a plain but wholesome repast. The young woman was suffering from what her father called Confinement to Barracks; she sat on the corner of the dressing-table, swinging her legs like a boy, and looking moodily, with a smouldering flame in her great dark eyes, at the darkening sea and sky and the black dots of people, streaming across and across the common and along the esplanade, their figures silhouetted on the sea.

Only just sunset—what *could* she do? The long hours of the long sunny day had lagged wearily; the pent-up activity was becoming unendurable. The sins she had been bidden to meditate upon were not at all amusing, at least in retrospect. Whistling on a paper-covered comb was all very well when anybody was present to be shocked. Drawing caricatures and making comic verses, mimicking people, dancing,—all were senseless without an audience. Poor Jack Dorrien was extremely wretched. Sometimes a door opened below, and a buzz of voices and light laughter was heard and hushed again. Through her wide-opened window voices of passers-by, scent of cigars, roll of carriages, cry of bugles, sound of distant music stole in. 'A fogey dinner, slow and boring,' was her contemptuous estimate of the family banquet below. To be out on the common, on the pier, or even the sea, was frequently stigmatised as slow; but that confinement to barracks made the slowest occupation bright by comparison.

What did she like? she wondered. Horses, dogs, men, and some women; music, singing, dancing, and—shocking people. Also captivating people. What was life worth, after all? Activity; yes, activity was the best thing; sitting still, torture. When one analysed activity, it meant enjoyment and admiration. To weave Circean spells about stern and inaccessible hearts, to watch the depths of infatuation into which the snared hearts fell, depth beneath depth, was—well! it was exciting—excitement was necessary, more necessary than bread. What good was life? What good was she? She looked with gloomy desperation down upon the road passing the house-front, seeking coigns of vantage that might be seized, clung to, and made a means of descent; but there was not so much as a waterspout within reach. Softly and

lightly she whistled the melody she had made during the day; it was charming; she had noted it down—on the wall-paper. Why was she always discontented? Few girls had so much gaiety as she—so much admiration and movement. What *did* she want? For the moment, she wanted to get out—but after? What a pity she had been born! Nobody had wanted her; she was a mistake, even dear old Dad had put up with her at first; she was more plague than profit to him now. Weary, dreary life; pleasures that leave a sting and perpetual, unsatisfied longing; pains that are insupportable, emptiness unendurable.

It did not seem strange or unnatural to this fine young animal with its embryo soul that she had no duty to fulfil from morning till night, from week's end to week's end; that all these fine and complex energies had no aim and no vent but pleasure and personal gratification. Weary pleasure, stale gratification; unsatisfying, soul-stifling existence!

Tap, tap, came a discreet hand on the door.

'Miss Greecie, dear,' called a discreet voice without.

'Pray come in, I am *quite* disengaged, Mursell,' with ironical emphasis. The key turned softly and was withdrawn, the door opened, admitting the old servant, who carefully locked it on the inside, and looked at the graceful figure darkly outlined against the waning light, with a dim comprehension of the piteous waste of all that vivid young life, unspoiled energy, intellect, passion and power, all that health and fresh beauty.

'Nay, dearie, but ye should ha' taken your dinner,' she rebuked, looking at the untouched food on the tray.

'I 'd a precious good mind to have taken it and shied it out of window, Mursie.'

'Yoong blued! yoong blued! Why canna ye do like other yoong leddies? I canna bear to see a fine, lithe lassie mewed up and fasting the long summer day. 'Twas ill done of ye, missie; it 's sore tried your poor mother is.'

'*Pax vobiscum*, Mursie; that is to say, don't preach. I 'm a bad lot, and there 's an end of it,' replied the prisoner, peeling and eating a peach Mursell had brought her. But Mursell intended to deliver her soul, and she delivered it, in spite of interruptions and expressions of impatience.

'Don't hit a fellow when he 's down, Mursie; it ain't fair,' the culprit remonstrated at the end of the discourse. 'It 's all true. But I don't want to behave myself; it 's so slow! I want larks. Now, I 'll make a bargain. Give me that key and let me out of this den into the garden for ten minutes, and I promise to be as

proper as prunes from to-morrow morning for a whole week, not counting Sunday.'

'Oh, Miss Greece, dear, and you twenty in six weeks! But I cannot stay, dearie, the ten minutes.'

'Mursell, I am surprised—and shocked. You should surely not offer Me such an insult. Fie, fie! I shall be on *parole*, the key in my pocket, of course.'

'Ye'll mind to lock the door, missie, then? And ye'll be back in this room in ten minutes, honour bright?'

Miss Dorrien took out her watch, which had run down, with a wounded air.

'In ten minutes, Mursell,' she replied with mournful dignity; 'since you doubt my honour, I promise to return to this apartment.'

'Laws! Miss Greece, how you do take a body up, to be sure. There's the key, lassie. Good-night.'

'Good-night, Mursell. Receive my benediction and forgiveness. Sin no more.'

In a flash the prisoner was outside, the door locked, the key in her pocket. Stepping as lightly and softly as a cat, she went to a window on the landing, unhasped it, and looked out. The house was at the corner; this window at its side looked over a small garden to a road leading up from the common; it opened on to a small gabled roof, standing in the angle of which, descent was possible to a lower window, and thence to leads: thence after a little run along these, to a projection whence the porch might be reached—from the porch was an easy leap to the grass below. Jack Dorrien's bright eye took note of these things in the twilight; she smiled, and went downstairs. In ten minutes she was back in her room with the door locked fast, but, of course, on the inside. Mursie had forgotten that, for she was busy with some delicate ironing that could not be left.

The ladies had withdrawn from the dining-room; the gentlemen were passing the bottle in a more workmanlike manner than is the custom in these days; heavier wine was taken, faces were flushed, tongues loosened, absence of ladies was held a greater advantage and relaxation. But to-night, for once, the same topic was discussed in drawing-room and dining-room. In the latter men told each other with bated breath the news they had picked up here and there—rumours and facts of vessels and troops sent, or about to be sent, to India; for this was the year of the Mutiny, and that topic was all-absorbing, especially in military circles. Few middle-class people then alive had not at least a cousin in

India. In the drawing-room ladies were whispering to each other what they had heard from husbands and brothers of the same topic. In those days of terror and agony, rumour far exceeded fact; many things were told that *could* only be whispered. Colonel Dorrien moaned and chafed at being on the retired list; others hoped—a very few secretly feared—to be sent out.

All was as pleasant and peaceful at the fashionable suburb of the great military and naval port, the sea sighing as softly along the shingly beach, as if no forts and no warships showed iron teeth above its tranquil waves. Lights glowed out in the harbour, on the pier, upon the sea, and along the esplanade; stars stole out into the soft August sky, a young crescent moon showed faintly; there was a hum and soft flutter of many people strolling in the pleasant evening.

Presently the tinkle of a guitar was heard. Colonel Dorrien, looking out of the open, uncurtained window, saw a street musician standing in the road edging the common, backed by some sea-stunted evergreens in the dim gaslight. Then a woman's voice in a foreign language rose above the guitar thrumming, and the national tragedy was forgotten. The men stood, or drew their chairs in a half-moon round the window, to look at the singer, a young and very handsome woman in the dress of a Spanish peasant, singing in Spanish a gay, light-hearted song, with a thrill of passion in it. She sang well, in a round, fresh mezzo, almost a contralto; her singing drew an ever-thickening crowd round her, and charmed faces to all the windows near.

The gentlemen in the dining-room were silent, the women in the drawing-room were silent, until the song ended, when the men in the window gave a round of applause, and a loud clapping of hands arose from the crowd outside. The singer smiled and bowed, as only Southern women smile and bow; but she did not forget to produce a little gold-embroidered velvet bag, that she handed round in a business-like way, with appealing smiles, and 'Ah! Señors,' 'Ah! Señoras,' 'Señoritas,' and 'Gracias,' which, with soft, dark Spanish eyes, long-lashed and black-rimmed, red lips, white teeth, and the dark downiness just outlining the upper lip, that sometime lends piquancy to Spanish beauty, soon enriched the bag, not only with copper, but silver, and even gold.

'Mother, dear,' whispered Laura, 'mayn't I run and bring Gracie down to hear?'

'Nonsense, child; she can hear and see equally well from her

room, if not better. She will be imitating this girl to-morrow, no doubt.'

'Jove! what a carriage!' observed one of the gentlemen; 'only Spanish women float like that.'

'English girls could do it without crinolines,' objected another.

'What short skirts!' 'And what ankles!'

'Encore! Encore!' shouted the crowd, when the bag had been round; then the girl, taking a rope with a couple of soft balls attached from the evergreens, playfully and gracefully flogged the crowd away, as acrobats do; and, leaving the guitar and rope on the evergreens, took some castanets in her hands, and sang a light melody, all ah! ah! and la, la, la! and began to dance.

Such a dance! the joy of full, fresh life, the lightness of hovering breezes, tumbling wave-crests, wind-tossed autumn leaves, the incessant motion of a ball tossed and caught by a leaping fountain, grace of raised and circling arms, smiling lips, and quick snap of castanets. Then slower movements, deeper song, silent castanets, drooping arms; after that, strong bounds, followed by languor of passion, intensity of desire, the song rising to a cry—surely the girl would exhaust herself. Not at all; mad clashing of castanets, the whirling dance of a Bacchante, then a wild, complex, continuous song and dance and click of castanets, in which all the rapture of youth and life and passion seemed concentrated, a sudden light bound, like the leap of a deer, a pause on one knee, a smile, a bowed head, followed by a thunder of applause.

Cries of 'Encore' were vain, coins flung were but languidly picked up; the bag was not again passed round; the beautiful musician, whose sinews and nerves must have been of steel, her blood of fire, and her limbs of air, languidly took her guitar and slung it, and, holding the bag and rope in one hand and castanets in the other, glided, almost melted, away through the crowd, towards the dark, sighing sea.

The gentlemen had arrived, almost unnoticed, in the drawing-room, whence it was easier to watch the dance, the crowd having obscured the sight of the Spaniard from below.

'Who could the singer be?' they wondered. No mere street musician, possibly some operatic star making holiday, and perhaps winning a wager. Alone though she appeared to be, there was probably some friend or companion in the crowd. 'Not an opera singer,' Mrs. Dorrien thought; the voice was not

sufficiently trained.'—Major Deane, who had been long in Spain, was ignorant of the dialect in which she sang. 'It was oddly mingled,' he reported, 'with pure Spanish.'

They watched the crowd roll over the common to the sea; it rolled so solidly that the dancer must have been at its head. It paused, a dark mass, on the distant esplanade; the faint tinkle of a guitar was heard from the midst of it. When the guests had melted away to the last of them, the crowd was still on the esplanade; the dance was being performed for the second time, under the glamour of moonlight, to the soft boom of a silvered sea. But with a difference.

It was the very poetry of motion; it had spontaneity, the deepest charm of all art, thus it varied with the emotion of the moment. The dancer, when she began, paused a moment, with raised arms and silent castanets, and looked at the sea, the waves of which rolled on a rising tide towards her feet, rolling reflected stars and broken reflections of forts, vessels, and lights. Then she began to dance to the dancing sea, in a perfect rapture of untrammelled freedom, a perfect intoxication of latent, unconscious passion; she seemed almost mad with the exhilaration of the wine of youthful life. Such a dance as fauns danced in Grecian marble and Grecian song, such a dance as wind-blown flowers and summer cornfields dance. She seemed to find fresh powers, new emotions, undreamed possibilities in that dance, and in the light, varied rhythm she sang to it. The rapt attention and hushed admiration of the crowd was fuel to the fire in her veins; the roll of the far-glimmering, mysterious sea chastened and refined the exuberant passion of life and joy within her. Such a dance she never danced before, perhaps never after.

The first dance produced a strange emotion in Laura Dorrien; her limbs quivered, her nerves thrilled with a wild impulse to spring from the window and dance with the dancer in the passion of a new joy waking within her. She could think of nothing else that night. Always the lithe figure danced and sang before her, while she played her modest part with her father's guests. When they were gone and she wished her mother good-night—her father had gone to the club-house for a game of billiards—she was pale with emotion. She could not explain it to herself.

She went to her sister's door, knocked softly, and then listened for the sound of her breathing.

'Grace,' she called, softly at first, then louder and louder, till she checked herself almost in terror. She felt vainly for the key, and found that it was withdrawn and the door fast; she peeped

through the keyhole, knocked and impatiently rattled the handle; all in vain; silence, darkness, and a feeling of emptiness seemed to inhabit that secluded chamber. Fair-haired, apple-blossom Laura was not quite eighteen; her blue eyes clouded, her heart beat to suffocation. She stole softly downstairs, into the room the sisters called theirs, where they worked, read, and wrote and kept their especial belongings, and looked for Grace's guitar. It was gone.

'Oh! Jack Dorrien, Jack Dorrien,' she moaned to herself when she reached her bedroom, 'what *will* become of you!'

'What's in a name?' Grace said one day; 'the Jack by any other name would be as fast.'

Heartfelt petitions were made for the erring elder sister that night by the white bed of innocent Laura. The poor child laid her fair head on her pillow with dreadful foreboding, wide-eyed, and trembling at every sound. She heard her father turn the latch-key and stumble upstairs with a sadly uncertain step, heard a carriage rumble by into the distance, felt that she should never sleep any more perhaps. In the midst of which melancholy assurance, her mind slipped and pitched headlong down infinite gulfs of young, untroubled sleep, whence she emerged slowly and with dim, confused sense of something wrong, in full morning sunshine, amid cheerful sounds of housemaids' brooms, milkmen's pails, and distant bugles.

She sprang at once from her bed and hastened, in dressing-gown and slippers, to Grace's door, and there, shining in the sun that streamed in at the open side-window, lay the key on the floor. She rubbed her eyes; surely she had been dreaming; how could she have missed seeing it over-night? But to make quite sure, she slipped in her white raiment, like a sunbeam, down the stairs to their sitting-room. There hung Grace's guitar in its accustomed place, with a broken string.

Laura went back to her room and her cold plunge, dressing in a very confused state of mind. 'What a wicked, suspicious girl she was, and how silly she had been,' she reflected.

Grace was still sleeping when Laura went in her fresh morning toilette to her sister's room, using the key first. The room was quite as usual, Grace cross and sleepy as usual when forcibly roused from sleep.

'Don't bother,' was her response to Laura's innocent surprise at the depth and length of her slumbers, especially considering the profound repose of the previous twenty-four hours.

'Wait till you get a C.B. yourself, Miss Proper,' she added. 'Solitary confinement drives people stupid. Nothing so drowsy as stupidity—except goodness. And I'm going to be good, fearfully and wonderfully good. You won't be in it for goodness. There!'

In one bound she was in the middle of the room, in a second Laura was kissed, turned out by the shoulders, and the door locked from within. In another second the bewildered Laura heard splashing of water and singing. But it was not a pious song, and Laura wondered how Jack could possibly contrive to be good, or what novel species of virtue that fertile brain would invent.

For herself, she went downstairs and pursued virtue and fine art at the same moment by practising her scales on the piano, until her maddened father and certain lazy young fellows in the next house, after ten minutes of muttered imprecations and vain attempts at slumber with muffled ears, turned out and dressed in sheer desperation.

CHAPTER IV

JACK DORRIEN was indeed, as she had threatened, fearfully and wonderfully good. Her very hair menaced virtue of the strictest order; it was carefully brushed down on each side of her usually vivid, but now subdued and tired face; the little soft rings, that were always escaping fluffily from the ordered waves, were gummed down with the stuff people used in those benighted days. She was, her friends thought, too good to be true; under this angel demeanour, they sadly feared, some fresh devilry of infinitely deeper dye was probably being hatched.

'You're as dull as ditch-water this morning, Jack,' her father growled. 'What the deuce have you done to your hair, child?' putting up his glass to see.

'Isn't it neat, dear papa? I am sorry. I combed it so carefully.'

'Did you see that girl dance last night, Jack?'

'Dance? Oh! no! I was C.B. you know. I thought I heard some singing and strumming on a guitar in the evening.'

'Really, Grace, I am sorry you missed it,' her mother said; 'it was quite unique. A Spanish peasant-girl, but quite a refined style of singing; the dancing even, though unfit for anything but the stage, was absolutely unobjectionable—nothing in the least vulgar.'

A general buzz of wonderment, speculation, and reminiscence of the Spanish girl followed. Miss Dorrien listened silently with

downcast eyes, and absorbed bread and marmalade with ladylike sobriety.

'Crowds surrounded her; she couldn't get away from them,' Colonel Dorrien observed. 'She had to square a policeman to keep them off at last.'

'What a very unfortunate and improper position for a young woman to be in,' was the pious comment of his eldest daughter. 'Had she *no* protector?'

'Gad, Gracie, she was quite able to take care of herself. A half-tipsy scamp of a fellow, excited by the dancing, went up to her, began some nonsense, and tried to kiss her—so I was told. What d'ye think she did? Gave him one straight out from the shoulder, and knocked him over as clean as a whistle!'

'Shocking!' commented Mrs. Dorrien, and Laura echoed—

'Shocking!'

'What was shocking, my dear—being nearly kissed, or knocking the fellow down?' Colonel Dorrien asked.

'Both. I almost think the knocking down the worst. So unwomanly,' his wife added.

'Well, my dear, if you think it womanly to be kissed by a tipsy soldier, you may; this is a free country,' chuckled the head of the family. 'But don't mention it before the girls. For my part, I like a girl with a little spirit. I'd have given something to see my lady floor her man. I can fancy our Jack hitting out clean and straight like that.'

'Oh! papa, pray don't fancy anything so improper of *me*,' remonstrated the blushing damsel.

'Come now, Jack, no humbug, my boy! Who drove a four-in-hand all the way home from Goodwood, and tucked tipsy Lord Jim inside the coach with the luncheon baskets? Ay, and who slipped her crinoline off to be able to do it properly? Who blew the horn all the way down to the races? Went without leave too?'

'I was younger then,' murmured the penitent, meekly veiling her blushes with a handkerchief. 'Is it quite kind to remind me of youthful errors? Pray, papa, did *you* never sow any wild oats?'

'Trust me! But it took me longer than two months to repent it, my dear,' chuckled the honest man.

'Really, Clarence, really!' rebuked Mrs. Dorrien.

'This girl sang the *Marseillaise*,' continued her worthy husband; 'sang it in stunning French too. And of all things, what should this Spanish woman, who couldn't speak a word of English, do,

but sing *Jim Crow*? Of course she danced it too, a young madcap. "Turn about, and wheel about, and jump Jim Crow," in good English.'

'Oh!' gasped Laura, 'Grace often sings *Jim*——' but a sisterly kick from under the table intervening, she broke off in pale dismay.

'No doubt,' Grace commented, 'she was an American Spaniard, and accustomed to hear negro songs.'

Laura could hardly believe her senses when, the day having turned rainy, she found Grace sitting quietly with her mother and herself, pursuing the fashionable female art of wool-work—a now extinct abomination. Not once was the work dashed across the room in a rage, not once were the wools tossed and tangled or thrown into the waste-paper basket, not once was the fatuous stupidity of fancy work vituperated. Grace sat still and stitched, and spoke only when spoken to. It was a miracle.

What the Dorriens lived upon had long been a problem to their friends. It was, unfortunately, a problem almost as hard of solution to themselves, or at least to the ladies. Mrs. Dorrien's brain was continually racked to discover some item in the family expenses to give up. While her husband was driving his four-in-hand and hunting twice a week, she had nothing but a brougham; she would not even have had that if they had lived within reach of cabs. One hack each she held enough for the girls. But even these had now been given up. Upon this rainy morning, in sight of the grey, moaning sea, things financial and otherwise took a darker hue than usual, and the old riddle how and where to economise was discussed.

'I really do not see how we could live more cheaply than at present,' she said, 'unless we tried some cheap foreign watering-place, which your father would never stand. Fortunately, muslins are worn at night now, and nothing is more charming for girls of your age. Jewels are out of place except at Court.'

'Not my pearls, mamma,' Laura urged. Grace said nothing, but she thought of a pink topaz necklace she had seen, and sighed deeply.

'No, dearest, a simple string of pearls is quite suitable for you. How different things might have been! I often wonder what your grandfather would think if he were aware of our embarrassments, if he could realise the misery and uncertainty, the denials and shifts of our lives. He is building palaces. He possesses whole towns. He is the sole owner of mines innumerable. I think he must be one of the richest men in the country. What

would four or five thousand a year be to him? A drop of water. And it would make us—happy. Oh! if he could but *know* how his only child and her children are situated!'

'Mother dear,' said Laura, fondling her, 'mayn't I write and tell grandpapa?'

'No, no, my precious; that would never do. Very good of you, darling, to think of it, but it would do harm. How a man can be so hard to his only child, I cannot understand. Of course, I did wrong—very wrong—in marrying without his consent as I did, but I have indeed repented. And oh!' she added, bursting into tears, 'the punishment is hard, hard—far beyond the sin.'

'You only ran away once, dearie, and it was *so* long ago,' said innocent Laura. 'Some day, perhaps, I shall be rich and make you happy.'

'You are my best comfort, Laurie, now.—As for you, Grace, I have long given up expecting the smallest sign of sympathy or affection from you.'

To the amazement of Laura, who was accustomed to sharp retorts from her sister, Grace made no reply, but stitched steadily on, her head bent over her work.

'A hard father and a hard daughter; I am indeed afflicted,' complained Mrs. Dorrien, drying her eyes and gulping down a sob. 'Laura darling, I really think the sun is coming out. You will have your garden party after all.'

Presently Grace rose, folded her work very tidily, put it away, and left the room. Mrs. Dorrien went to the writing-table and began a letter. She was in the midst of her correspondence when the door opened, and Grace, very pale, walked into the middle of the room and stood still and stiff before her.

'Mother,' she then said, in a half-stifled voice.

'Well,' returned Mrs. Dorrien, not looking up from her writing, 'what is it?'

'If you please, mother, I behaved ill and spoke unbecomingly to you the day before yesterday,' she jerked out awkwardly.

'There is no doubt about that,' returned Mrs. Dorrien acidly.

'I beg pardon,' faltered the culprit.

'I am glad to hear that you are at least aware of the necessity,' replied the mother icily, 'but I could wish you to do it with a better grace.'

Stamp went Jack Dorrien's foot on the floor, sharp round, with a flounce of her crinolined skirts, she turned, walked out of the room, and shut the door with a terrific bang.

'Oh, mother,' cried Laura, looking up from her book, 'poor Jack was crying, actually *crying*!'

'Let her cry,' observed the affectionate parent, just as tender-hearted Laura opened the door to find her sister sobbing with all her might outside.

'And then,' cried Grace, 'she wonders at her father's hardness! W–w–what can she expect of the father of s–s–such a woman?'

Mrs. Dorrien, smitten with compunction, had risen with some vague intention of mitigating her severity; but this fiercely sobbed retort struck her to the heart, she turned pale, shuddered, and sank in her chair, her face buried in her hands.

Was she indeed hard to her child? Surely she was tried as mortal woman never before had been by this untameable, head-strong girl. Still, she was the last to be excused for severity to her children, conscience told her; so, after a sharp struggle with herself, she rose and went to find Grace, who had vanished from the house.

She appeared, however, at luncheon, immaculately and simply arrayed for the garden party, all traces of emotion removed from her face, and an excellent appetite. Her mother, glancing keenly at her, was conscious of an inward hardening and repugnance to her. She made no further reference to the morning's outburst, contenting herself with an intention of more considerate and gentler bearing towards her troublesome child in future.

For a whole week Jack Dorrien's conduct was, according to Mursell's testimony, a 'moral to any yoong leddy in the land.'

'Which shows, Mursie dear,' the moral observed, 'what a good plan it is to give me my head. Curb me, and I kick the splinter-bar to atoms and stand on my hind legs.'

It cannot be said that her family really enjoyed Jack's virtue; an uneasy feeling was in the air, a sense of expectancy mingled with loss. The home circle was distinctly duller for the absence of the accustomed pranks and outbreaks. Even Laura was driven to wish that virtue of a livelier description could be invented; while, at the same time, she was torn by fears lest her sister's sudden and surprising good behaviour should be the forerunner of an early death. Not one flirtation, no sitting out of consecutive dances with a friend, no partner accepted for more than two dances during a whole evening; no chats upon balconies, stairs, or ships' decks; no boating or walking unknown to parents in a solitude *à deux*; no mischievous observations made with an air of angelic unconsciousness, no comic songs, no slang, no mimicking of worthy but eccentric friends; no taking

off of the Governor to his very face in the presence of his convulsed *aides*; no insoluble problems innocently propounded to the port Admiral and other grave potentates. Not once did she walk on the pier except under the maternal wing, or go to listen to military bands except by her mother's or her father's side.

'I say, Jack, old fellow,' the good paterfamilias exclaimed one day, 'what 's up? You aren't ill, are you?'

'No thank you, dear papa; I 'm only good.'

'Oh! only good—hm—well! girls ought to be good, I suppose,' he observed with a dubious air.

'I 'm afraid they ought. That is one reason why it is so unpleasant to be a girl.' This was said as the Dorrien family *en masse* entered the church door one Sunday morning. Jack frequently rebelled at what she called church parade; but once in church, she was a model of propriety, and would not so much as use a fan or a smelling-bottle; nay, she even scowled darkly on her poor mother for these frivolities; she never made nor heard whispers, however necessary.

Her father glanced at her that morning during the sermon with serious disquiet; her slender form rose lightly from billowing masses of muslin; her slim hands, in pale salmon pink gloves, were lightly clasped on the muslin flounces; a silken thing, shaped like a cockle-shell, seemed to be falling off the back of her head, but was held there by ribbons tied in a bow under her chin; her eyelids drooped persistently, her face never changed. Was she being converted? Would she renounce society and amusement and spend her days in prayer-meetings, tracts, and under-garments for the poor, like the well-known fair, though somewhat frail, Mrs. Blank, precursor of professional beauties, who had recently abandoned society to give lectures and conduct prayer-meetings? Heaven forbid! Or was there something behind? Her mother was a bolter; that sort of thing runs in families.

They walked home in sedate silence; then Colonel Dorrien, assuming what his eldest child called the heavy father, requested a private interview with her in what was facetiously termed his study, an apartment sacred to the goddess Nicotine, whose rites were in those distant days more occult than in these.

'What a distressing odour, dear papa!' Grace exclaimed with a shudder, as she sank into the most comfortable chair she could find, and held a patchouli-scented handkerchief to her face.

'What distressing humbug!' was the quick rejoinder. 'Oh, Jack, Jack, what mischief are you up to now, and where in the world did you get that pink topaz necklace you wore at the

ball on Tuesday?' added the honest soldier, under the impression that he was approaching the subject gradually and with tact and discretion.

'Dear me, Daddy, I had no idea you had so much curiosity and observation,' returned the cautious Jack, who, having gone to the ball accompanied only by her father, had trusted to his masculine obtuseness not to observe the trinket, put on and removed in the cloakroom.

'You don't know everything, Jack, my lad—thank goodness! But it's high time you knew—that girls don't wear expensive jewels without their parents' knowledge.'

'So it appears Well, dear, if you *must* know, I got it at Malachi's on the Hard. If you remember, I ran back while you were chatting with the Drews the other day.'

'*That* necklace? Why, it was marked twelve guineas. How the dickens are you to pay for it?'

'I have paid for it—on the spot.'

Colonel Dorrien turned purple; he looked down, he looked up, and then said hoarsely—

'Where did you get twelve guineas?'

'Daddy, dear, can you keep a secret?' she asked gravely; 'I really want to tell you all about it.'

'I hope you may trust your own father,' he replied, almost with a sob.

'Will you promise not to tell even mother or Laurie?'

'Honour bright.'

'I'm afraid you will be angry, and I'm sorry. Well, then, I earned it—honestly.'

'Oh, Jack, Jack! honestly? How—how could you earn twelve guineas, my girl?'

'Fifteen shillings from you—five at the window, ten by the sea.'

He turned red and pale and red again. 'Good Heavens,' he cried, 'my daughter, my Gracie, singing and dancing—alone—at night—in public before those—out in the open street—Oh! Jack, Jack!'

'Oh, Daddy dear, don't tell; don't let it out,' she sobbed; 'it was the C.B.; I *couldn't* sit still any longer. But I didn't mean it all. I only meant it for our own house—to get a rise out of you and the others. Then I couldn't get rid of the people. I'd no idea I should attract a crowd. They followed me here and surrounded me there, and I had nowhere to go. Well, after all, it *was* a stunning lark. But I'll never do it again—indeed,

indeed I won't. And then I did badly want that necklace. Malachi let me have it for ten guineas. It's probably worth seven.'

After some meditation and some contemplation of his daughter's tearful face, Colonel Dorrien burst out into a jovial, genial laugh.

'Upon my life, Jack,' he exclaimed, 'if you are not a young blackguard of the first water! Well, my dear, you've made a clean breast of it, after all; but how the—how did you manage to break bounds?'

'Landing window, leads, waterspout; easy enough in short skirts and no crinoline.'

'Gad, Gracie, you'd make your fortune on the stage, child, or in a circus. But this must be the last fling, remember. No more of these goings-on. You don't know the risk you ran. Girls never do till too late. And, look here, old boy, you'll hand me over that necklace.'

'Very well. But don't get Malachi to take it back; I doubt if he'd give you more than five guineas for it. Give it to Laura, Daddy dear.' But he gave it to Grace three days later, solemnly, in the presence of the family, who were surprised at the blushing meekness with which it was received by the family scapegrace.

The seaside sojourn, though palliated by garrison gaieties, was beginning to bore Colonel Dorrien sadly, when an invitation came to Mrs. Dorrien to pass a few weeks at Newcourt Place with her cousins. Lady Wotton stipulated for one daughter, but had not room for two, her son having filled the house with men of his own age, who came for shooting.

Mrs. Dorrien was torn between a desire to give Grace the excellent opportunity of settling in life this over-manned house-party promised, and Laura the pleasure and healthfulness of the visit. Her husband was bent on going to Homburg or Baden-Baden *en garçon*. What was to be done with the other daughter?

'Send Laurie by the seaside or into the country with Mursell,' her husband suggested.

'Send me,' Grace asked; 'I don't get on with the Garennes; Cousin Emma can't endure me; and as for Wotton—well, he's a little too abject in his devotion. I hate men who grovel on the carpet and request people to be so kind as to stamp upon them.'

'My dear Grace, when *will* you learn to express yourself with propriety and reserve?' lamented her mother. 'If you really wish to go to the north with Mursell, who naturally wishes to see her friends there, I see no objection to the plan. I don't

suppose you will have any opportunity of getting into mischief there. And that Mursell will take every precaution, I am convinced. And, until Laura outgrows this delicacy, I do not care to have her out of my sight.'

'She'd much better go south than north,' said Jack, looking down at her plate with the strangest little smile; 'the days draw in and the evenings are chilly—and—I should like to see the Lake Country.'

This arrangement found favour with the whole family. Colonel Dorrien, though fond and proud of his two pretty daughters, found the part of paterfamilias a tedious one to play for any length of time. After a period of domestic virtue he wanted what he called a breather. Mrs. Dorrien loved the peace and propriety of Newcourt, the dignity and the absence of any faintest taint of rowdyism, the pleasure of Lady Wotton's society, the repose of forgetting a while the anxieties inseparable from Clarence Dorrien's wife and fast Jack Dorrien's mother. Mursell was doubly enchanted at the chance of seeing old friends and having her wild nurseling, who was naturally her darling, to herself. But Laura did not care to be separated from Jack, who was an enigma, a delight, a torment, and a refuge to her. It was Jack, who took off her own cloak and wrapped it round her delicate sister, when driving home in an open carriage in the evening chill; Jack, who, in earlier days, took all the blame of common mischief upon herself, helped her on with her lessons and work, scolded, petted, amused her, and ruled her with a rod of iron; Jack, whose escapades and reckless daring filled her with secret admiration; Jack, whose perpetual misconduct made such a foil to her own extreme propriety, and acted as a lightning-conductor to draw away parental wrath.

'We'll write to each other every day, darling,' she comforted herself with saying.

'Catch me,' retorted Jack, putting her hands in her jacket pockets and whistling, 'you may scribble as much as you like.'

'Well, then, you'll tell me why the hare's foot and make-up box was on your dressing-table, and the hand-basin was full of dark brown water the morning after your last C.B., won't you?'

'I'll tell you to mind your own business and learn not to be petty and missish, you horrid brat.'

Miss Dorrien's luggage for this country excursion included her guitar, her sketch-book, no French novels—read purely because forbidden—but such mental fare as Tennyson, Wordsworth, Mrs. Browning, *Sartor Resartus*, *Eothen*, *Friends in Council*, and a

Ruskin volume; also, to the surprise of Mursell, who was bidden not to mention it, a riding habit and some evening dresses.

Grace accompanied her father to the station and saw him into the Dover train; for the worthy gentleman considerately went away before his family, so as to leave Mrs. Dorrien free to pay bills and make arrangements for departure, unembarrassed by his presence.

'Daddy dear,' she said, as they drove off from the house together, 'should you be *very* angry if I were to call on Sir Geoffrey Harbord on my way to Keswick? Mother would forbid it probably. But she is wrong. And she can't forbid me if I don't ask.'

Her father gasped with amazement.

'Jack,' he ejaculated, 'you clever little scoundrel. I thought something was up.'

'You see, Daddy,' she continued with a serene smile, 'it is only a proper attention to call on one's grandfather when in his neighbourhood. I see no reason why I should not pay my respects to the dear old gentleman. *I* have no quarrel with him. How could *I* help my mother's running away? My advice was not so much as asked. Had it been, I should certainly have forbidden the banns.'

'Don't be pert, miss. Gad! Jack, it's a serious thing to do. You may upset the family apple-cart, or you may set us all on our legs again.'

'Could things be worse than they are, and have been apparently ever since the runaway match? Twenty-one years that business has lasted without any break.'

'You young villain; it's true. But, for Heaven's sake, Jack, look before you leap. The old gentleman is of the old school—ceremonious, proper, masterful, most particular about women. One slang word would do for the lot of us. Girls must look down, only speak when spoken to, that kind of thing. You'll have to mind your P's and Q's, Jack, and practise saying "prunes and prisms" a week beforehand.'

'I trust, dear sir, that I may conduct myself with propriety befitting my station. I am not,' she added, with an air of wounded dignity, 'wholly devoid, so I am told, of the attractions peculiar to my sex and age. Nor am I entirely without accomplishments or taste. I have yet to learn that I am deformed, a monster, or an idiot.'

'You unutterable blackguard!' he chuckled, in a rapture of admiration and delight.

'There are sons at Hardwin, but no daughters. Sir Geoffrey, by all accounts, is a man of *taste*. The spectacle of female youth and—I hope I may, without immodesty, add—some slight degree of beauty at Hardwin Hall cannot fail to impress him.'

'Come, come, Jack, we all know how dangerous you are. But you cannot, you really cannot, flirt with your grandfather. I believe it's forbidden in the Bible, or else the Prayer Book.'

'You are not, my dear sir, at least as far as I know, a Wordsworthian. Were you one, you would recall those exquisite lines in the "Two April Mornings'—

"The maid was fair and very fair,
Her beauty made me glad."'

'Gracious goodness, Jack, what a headpiece you have! You get all this cleverness and poetry and that from Sir Geoffrey, and your blackguardism from me, I suppose.'

'Indeed, sir, what young female of any breeding could be so rude as to contradict a revered parent? I shall have old Mursie to back me up and tell me what's what, Dad. She'll give me the straight tip. I suppose there will be a stunning row when mother hears about it, however it turns out.'

'Your mother's a good woman, Grace. It was a black day for her when—thanks to Brinson Hythe—she went off with me. She's had—oh! she's had more to put up with than you'll ever know, my dear.'

'Which of us has not?' she returned, with a curious sparkle in her bright eyes that he did not see. 'So Mr. Hythe-Harbord made that match? How generous, how noble of him!'

'Hang it, Jack, I don't know what you mean. I wish you'd speak plain out. Well, good-bye, my lad. And when you bolt—I'm afraid you're a bolter——'

'Not I. I shall marry who I like and when I like, Daddy; I'd scorn to bolt.'

'Whatever happens, you'll have your head, Jack. And if you're not let have it, you'll take the bit between your teeth——'

'What excellent sentiments! I trust, my dear sir, you will never fail to act upon them.'

'Oh! Stow humbug, Jack. When you do go in double harness——'

'It won't be on one side of a pole. I shouldn't so much mind being leader in a tandem——'

'I—I hope you'll choose a steadier and a better fellow than I've ever been—that's all.'

'Daddy, dear, I shall be lucky if I get one half or a quarter as good.'

The train slowed off; the figure in the white-winged hat, gracefully waving farewell from the platform, was swallowed in the distance. Colonel Dorrien turned, with a somewhat haggard gaze and a catch in his breath, to his paper, and caught the eye of his fellow-traveller.

'Your daughter?' asked the latter.

'Certainly,' with British haughtiness and resentment.

'A-ah! But you are to envy. You are proud? Hein? I too am father. Mine has but two years. But this *belle Anglaise*, of a *chic*, of a grace, of an *entrain*. I con-grat-u-late. A cigar?'

'Thanks. Yes; my eldest child, a young scamp. Plague of one's life. You manage these things better in France. Shut them up safe in a convent till you've looked out a husband for them. We let ours run loose; no wonder our hair turns grey before the time.'

The subject of these remarks was sailing out of the station on a billow of muslin and crinoline, hands in jacket pockets, hat, severely straight in the presence of her sire, slightly tipped to one side, mouth rounded to an incipient whistle. She was accompanied by an officer of subaltern rank, whose face was imbecile with rapture, until they turned the corner towards the street, when a second warrior, curled and oiled in the fashion of those days, and of superior rank, was kind enough to join them, upon which the subaltern's countenance darkened and his eyes shot baleful fire. Thus carefully guarded by her military escort, Jack Dorrien walked home, affably chatting with her young friends, and wondering which of the two cast the most murderous looks at the other, though she was equally friendly with each. 'And then people say that I flirt,' she mused pensively, as she firmly but kindly said good-bye to each at the same moment, before 'heaving in sight,' as she called it, of home.

A small lodging was chosen by Mursell at Ambleside on her arrival with her young lady at that charming village. It was clean, picturesque, and homely, in a small, slate-roofed, grey stone cottage, with a flower border in front and a glimpse of lake and mountains, red-berried rowan-trees, and autumn mellowed foliage from its windows. They sat down to a tiny round table on a slate floor in the twilight, by a peat fire, just lighted, and pleasant in the sweet, eager mountain air. The linen was coarse homespun, the fare—char fresh from the lake, ham, new brown bread, hot girdle-cakes, oatcake, honey, and cream—a singular, but fresh and appetising, repast.

'Mursell,' cried Grace excitedly, hesitating between the rival

attractions of oatcake and honey, and girdle-cake and butter, 'what, oh! what is that delightful sound?'

'Eh! Miss Greecie dear, it's no but a spinning-wheel.'

'A real spinning-wheel? Why, it is a perfect idyl!'

'Nay, but it's a fine strange idol, I'm thinking, Missie. Ye'd not think it an idol if ye'd had to spin, spin the dee long, and you a bonnie lile lass that felt of her life all through her, and wanted to be out on the fells and in the woods.'

Mursell was tall and spare, with bright eyes and a sharp nose, her years being just over forty; she wore black and subdued colour, and no crinoline, then in its first youth.

Grace took kindly to this country life; she put on a plain linen gown and a shady hat, restricted her circumference, and rowed Mursell on the lake, picnicked in the pleasant woods upon its banks, or climbed the fells, followed by a boy with baskets and books. Mursell, who was always in attendance, walked and climbed well, but had some difficulty in keeping pace with her active young charge. When Mursell was 'fair beat,' she was planted on some coign of vantage, whence Grace, being on honour not to leave her, could make small excursions, or sit and read, sketch, and muse within sight. There were long idle spaces of time while rowing, or walking, or at table, when conversation became a necessity. Then Mursell was set to talk of her youth, of the ways of statesmen, of the legends, traditions, and folklore of the dales; also of her first service, and her going to Hardwin Hall to be trained ladies'-maid by the old woman who had served, first Lady Grace, and then her orphan child.

There were endless stories of Sir Geoffrey, of Miss Carrie and of Miss Harbord, the Aunt Adelaide, whose money now mainly supported the Dorriens—of Mr. Brinson Hythe and his early passion for his scornful cousin, tales of other places belonging to the Harbords, and of their town house and all the gaieties and vanities of Miss Carrie's coming out. Grace heard the history of the clandestine wooing, of Sir Geoffrey's dislike to Mr. Clarence Dorrien, of his desire to marry his only child to a man who would increase his great possessions, share his tastes, build splendid dwellings, and found a noble family; of Sir Geoffrey's strong and masterful character, of his devotion to his dead wife, of the beautiful picture of Lady Grace, dead in her youth and fresh bloom. Sometimes there was mention of later times, rumours concerning Mrs. Brinson Hythe, scared and sorrowful, of strange misfortunes befalling her through her children.

Then, one day, Grace, rowing steadily upon Lake Ulswater

under flanks of dark purple mountains, rested on her oars, the boat doubled in the silver mirror of the lake, and, bending her dream-filled eyes on Mursell, said—

'Let us try to take lodgings at Hardwin for a week, Mursie; I should dearly like to see the old place.'

CHAPTER V

'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.'

MURSELL was made of incorruptible elements. In trusting her alone with the wild and headstrong girl, who was her own despair, Mrs. Dorrien knew that she was building upon rock. Yet Mursell took Grace to Hardwin without her mistress's knowledge.

It was not only that her favourite nursling had 'that way with her,' as she said, that she could almost persuade her that black was white, and that she was backed up by Colonel Dorrien's express desire; but also, apart from her confidence in the solid good sense she recognised beneath Grace's wayward exterior and young exuberance and exaggeration, Mursell was firmly convinced of the wisdom of the proposed step, had longed for it, and suggested it to her mistress more than once. But the Harbord pride had ever been an insurmountable barrier, though Mursell felt that Mrs. Dorrien might, in this case, be glad to have her expressed wishes defied. To clinch the matter, Mursell longed deeply to revisit scenes in which she had been young and gay and not a little courted. What fields and woods, what hills and vales, the wide world over, have half the glamour of those in which we have spent the blossom and song-time of life? Mursie, too, had been in Arcadia; nightingales had thrilled her heart with the rapture of moonlight melody; she too had taken the primrose way and shaken the dew from cowslip bells, had wandered in those enchanted woods that can only be threaded two by two. But where was her fellow-wanderer? Mursie knew, but never said.

That September—it was the ever-memorable September of the first relief of Lucknow—was superb in Lakeland; they were out of doors the livelong day and part of the night, on the water or over the fells.

Grace contrived to give a poetic charm to the prose of church-going on the strict Sabbath Mursie exacted, by rowing over to Bowness Church in the morning with a luncheon basket, that was put to excellent use between the services on the pebbly shore, where they could be quite still and solitary, hearing robins singing,

trees rustling, and water lapping in the soft, sweet way of lake waters. There, while Mursell dozed, Grace dreamed, and watched shadows glide over the purply brown fells, light ripples darken the silken surface of the water, azure in light, dark brown in shadow, silver in the wake of vessels, and fed the swans gliding haughtily to the lake shore, with curving necks and black paddles. Such mundane pursuits as blackberrying, flower-gathering, sketching, guitar-playing, were strictly prohibited, so there was nothing but dreaming to be done in the golden noontime.

The afternoon service over, they rowed back to Ambleside. Lovely amethystine shadows lurked in the dimpling fells, splendour grew and grew in the west behind darkening mountains, and was reflected in the water. Wray Castle took a false charm in the glory of declining day. The light outrigger shot swiftly over the clear lake surface, or lingered about islands and bays overhung by wooded heights.

Presently Grace shipped her sculls and let the boat drift upon its own impetus, till its silver trail narrowed and faded, and they were quiescent in a tranquil bay flooded with misty gold sunshine. Then she sang softly and slowly—

'The splendour falls on castle walls,'

and found a natural echo to the elfin horns before Mursie had time to rebuke her for the secularity of her song.

'I say, Mursie,' she began, looking thoughtfully ahead with dark, deep eyes, some shades browner than the brown, deep lake, 'are you happy?'

'Eh! Miss Greecie dear, it's no happy we should want to be, but good,' replied Mursell, somewhat startled, but not forgetting herself.

'Mursie,' returned her young lady, unshipping the sculls and keeping the boat still with them, 'that is a lie.'

'Miss Greece!'

'It is a—*damned* lie,' continued Miss Grace, very sweetly and gently. 'Forgive the expression, Mursie dear. Nobody but the devil could possibly have invented the lie that people are not even to want to be happy. I don't think much of the devil.'

'Shame on ye, Miss Greece, on the Sabbath afternoon, and we just from the Kirk.'

'What do you think, Mursell,' continued Grace, half resting on the sculls, and half playing them to keep the boat in position, 'I am awfully happy here; I've never been so happy all my life long. It's the very stunningest lark I ever had.'

'Ye've been a good lassie, dearie, and that's the reason why ye're happy,' replied Mursell, adding, with beautiful irrelevance, 'Ah! Miss Greecie dear, if there were no lads about ever; it's a better lassie ye'd be.'

'I daresay you are right. The lads are such fun. Do you remember that young donkey in the marines? I could make him turn pale or red at any moment, just as I pleased. I have seen men—mature men, not young unfledged donkeys—tremble at the first sight of me. All girls do, I suppose, even the prim ones. But it's—oh, Mursie, it's just the salt of life.'

'Eh, but that salt dries up the youth and the life of ye.'

'"I have no men to govern in this wood. That makes my only woe——"' continued Grace dreamily.

'Dear, dear missie, dinna say joost that. It's no wood we're in, but just a mere; and it's the no men that keeps ye good.'

'And this is better than the Nile—the silence, the beauty, and the solitude. Sails of purple silk and golden oars, the "wit, the dalliance, and the strife," for "the sleep that is among the lonely hills." I should like to marry a poet, a poor man like Wordsworth, and live in Lakeland for ever and ever.'

'And I should like to marry ye to a good man with a masterful spirit, that would look after ye and keep ye straight.'

'And give up the world and vanities. I would wear cotton frocks, dine at mid-day, and copy his poems. Mursie dear, if I should chance to die——'

'Chance, missie? It's no chance. Dying is the only thing ye're dead sure of. Ye should mind it.'

'I do mind it. I don't want to die—just yet. It'll keep. Learning and loving and being happy must be done now or never. You can die at any age with equal thoroughness. Well, if I should die to-night, I shall have been happy once, perfectly happy. Remember that. Am I *fey*? Is it a foreboding of death?'

'Ye'd better take it so and prepare and make your peace.'

'I don't quite think I shall die, though. It's borne in upon me that I may possibly live to be an old woman, older than mother or you even; and then, if I have nothing else pleasant to remember, I shall think of this sweet place and be glad. Just this picture; the mountains, the purple heather, the woods, this clear, placid lake, that pale, pure sky, the glory in the west. This *is* elf-land. I hear the horns faintly blowing and the echoes rolling "from soul to soul." I shall row over the lake in dreams, climb the fells, and hear the fall of many waters, in dreams.'

The boat had drifted lightly, imperceptibly, towards the shore, where bog-myrtle and sweet gale grew, robins were warbling soft, clear vespers and slant sunbeams turned the boat to burnished gold, wove an aureole about Miss Grace's head, and dazzled Mursie's eyes. The little boat might never have reached Ambleside, so lovely it was to linger there, but that Mursie wanted her tea, and utterly declined to break the Sabbath by going ashore to get it at an inn.

'Well, then, Mursie, it's the last day here, and the moon nearly full. And here we stop, tealess, till after moonrise, unless you promise to come out again with the guitar. If you will promise, then I'll sing you "Angels ever bright" and "The Land o' the Leal."'

So it was done. Mursell wept under the sweet influences of moonlight, music, and an unconscious something in her favourite's voice that reminded her she had never yet walked, but was doomed to walk, in the enchanted wood.

It was at set of sun next day that Grace first saw her mother's birthplace in the blue distance. She saw it from the window of the village inn, the *White Hart*, opposite the church, the bells of which were ringing merrily, and inspired them with courage as a good omen.

The landlord of Mursell's youth had long been sleeping in the churchyard; the son who reigned in his stead knew nothing of Mrs. Mursell and her young mistress. But he knew that the family were at the Hall just then, though he could not be made to discuss them with strangers. 'The picture galleries and certain parts of the great house and gardens were open to the public twice a week, from dawn till dusk,' he said. Grace went about singing—

> 'Oh, the oak and the ash and the bonnie ivy tree,
> They flourish at hame in my ain countree,'

active and untired, till Mursell, whose more frequent journeyings up May hill made her long for a little rest after the jostling and oscillation of trains and flys, had to consent, in sheer desperation, to a moonlight ramble in the park. There the deer fed peacefully, broad oaks and lofty beeches cast black shadows across dewy grass, and deep mystery brooded in groves and plantations, the foliage of which was motionless as carven silver.

In and out of the heavy shadows, now in glamour of white moonlight, now swallowed in solid darkness under trees, they climbed; now startling herds of deer, now scaring rabbits and

hares from their evening gambols, now startled by the light patter of chestnuts and acorns dropping from their cups, silent and somewhat oppressed, until a bend in the white road brought them in sudden sight of the fairy palace, all ablaze beneath the pale moonlit sky, and looking as if piled there on its commanding eminence by enchantment. At this beautiful sight Grace stopped short with a faint cry. She stood like a statue, silent and absorbed, shading her eyes with her hand, till Mursell's patience gave out, and she turned off the road to rest on a fallen tree-trunk, just as the lighted clock in the central tower made its melodious prelude before striking eight. But it was long before her young lady joined her.

The dreamy, ethereal effect of this enormous pile of masonry, diffusing radiance far around, was almost oppressive, quite unexpected. 'It can't be real, Mursell,' Grace murmured; 'I seem to remember such places in dreams. But mother's sketch gives one no idea of this.'

'It's no the same, missie. The place has grown and grown. The big tower with the clock is younger than you. They say there's a curse on it all. Sir Geoffrey has cast out his own and an ill spirit has taken his soul. They do say, dearie, the ill spirit builded all this. No Christian could think it all oot. See to the height and the width and the length o't. And the lights burning and blazing as though it was Heaven itself. It isna canny, dearie. Aie! Aie!' she shrieked, as something white swept past her in the dimness with a wild and mournful 'Whoo-hoo, whoo-hoo-oo,' and she sprang to her feet, clasping the hands of Grace, who was standing near, with an ashen face and trembling limbs. 'Preserve us,' gasped Mursell, 'but I did not neeme the ill spirit.'

'It's only an owl, Mursie,' faltered Grace, weak with laughter; 'conscience makes cowards of us. Look at it flying low for its supper.' The creature, again balked, rose and repeated its mournful, weird 'Whoo-hoo-oo.'

'And the inside,' continued Mursell, resuming her seat, and valorously trying to ignore the scare, 'it is that rich and splendid. It is no like a hoose for sinners, missie; the Kirk itself is poor beside it. Sir Geoffrey eats off the red goold plate like the good folk in the hills. But ye'll see it, dearie. And ye have the catalogue. Thousands and thousands of pounds are in they walls. It is richer and richer Sir Geoffrey grows with every dee; the more he spends, the richer he grows. And it's the curse upon him, dearie, for his hard, hard heart.'

'Then, after all, it may be nothing but fairy gold, and vanish

at daylight. And this great palace of art may be but an enchanted vision and fade away at the touch of truth, like Lamia's beautiful banqueting-hall, Mursie. I may break the curse, who knows? I wonder if the fairy prince, who came through the fire to the Sleeping Beauty, felt as frightened as I am? or Childe Roland when he came to the Dark Tower? There must be a great horrid dragon about somewhere, guarding the treasure. Perhaps he's crawling under the oaks, crashing his great jaws together. Don't you hear him swinging his horrid scaly tail? I shouldn't a bit wonder if he calls himself Brinson Hythe-Harbord.'

'Whoo-hoo-oo! whoo-hoo-oo!' hooted another white owl, flying past the open, uncurtained windows of the grand dining-room.

'How is it?' complained Mr. Hythe-Harbord, 'that those owls have not been routed out? The house is uninhabitable with such pests about.'

'Send some one at once after that owl,' Sir Geoffrey said to the venerable butler, who still wore the gold chain and velvet gown, and poured wine beneath the story of Persephone and the child-lorn Demeter. 'And so,' he added, 'you heard from Newcourt to-day?'

'Yes. Cousin Emma sends kindest regards. The house is full; amongst others, Mrs. Dorrien and her daughter are there.'

'What's become of her delightful husband, Brin?'

'Colonel Dorrien, I'm told,' replied Brinson, with a kind of languid enjoyment, 'can't stand domestic bliss for any length of time. He's gone off somewhere *en garçon*.'

'To Homburg, Lady Wotton said,' Mrs. Brinson timidly explained; but she looked as if she expected to be flatly contradicted, and possibly murdered as well.

'With one daughter?' the old man asked; 'I thought there were two.'

'There are two—Jack Dorrien and Laura. Fast Jack Dorrien. Nobody seems to know where she is at present. A regular chip of the old block is fast Jack Dorrien.'

'Whath fath?' lisped Pippin, who had been crooning to himself at his mother's side.

Sir Geoffrey raised his eyes with a wistful sadness to the young face above the chimney-piece, the charm of whose glance pervaded the room. 'Your grandchild,' he seemed to be saying; 'is it possible? Poor thing!' he added aloud, 'what could be expected with such a beast of a father?'

'"Do men gather grapes of thorns?"' quoted Brinson piously, selecting some muscatels from a dish. 'Caroline talks of their

likeness to their father as if it was the most delightful thing in the world.'

'The brute was handsome enough, confound him. Surely, Brinson, you don't mean that the Dorriens let this girl run about by herself? She hasn't run away with any man, has she?'

'It 's not always possible to control the movements of a woman grown,' he replied. 'Lady Wotton usually knows their movements; she accounts for all the rest, but says nothing of fast Jack.'

'I miss her at daybreak,
I seek her at noon,
When the sun sets in purple,
When owls hoot the moon.

'Oh, daughter, my daughter,
Dark, dark is the sky;
I wander the world round,
The wind is my cry'

Pippin crooned, his head stayed upon his mother's shoulder, his face turned upwards to the story of Persephone on the ceiling.

'Stop him, Amy,' his father whispered, observing the purple flush on Sir Geoffrey's strong face.

But Pippin, startled by the silver shiver of a glass dashed on the floor, stopped of himself, trembling; and then, glancing fearfully at the veined dark hand whence the glass was flung, turned to his old lament, 'Far, far in fairyland,' the piercing anguish of which was so insupportable.

'"Childe Roland to the dark tower came,"' repeated Jack Dorrien, when she stood in the next morning's sunshine, flushed and sparkling from her upward walk through the park, at her grandfather's door, beneath an archway in the great central tower, and pulled the beautiful wrought-iron bell handle. The bell was heavy, the first pull ineffectual; but into the second she threw all her strength, and sent such a clangour echoing through courts and corridors as brought her heart to her mouth and caused Mursell to say her prayers silently. It also brought a couple of men to throw the two-leaved door wide enough to admit a carriage into the grand quadrangle beyond the archway.

'What might your business be, Miss?' one of the men, astonished to see the young lady and her attendant pass through without question, asked, stepping quickly up to her.

'To see Sir Geoffrey,' she replied shortly, without stopping.

'Beg pardon, Miss, Sir Geoffrey never receives at this time. Can I take any message or card?'

'Certainly not. Go back to your gate.'

'But if you please——'

'Go back. Send him away, Mursell.'

'Eh! but yon lass has a prood eye,' the man said to his fellow. 'I canna stop yoong leddies by force, whatever the mawster may say.'

'One would think it was an ogre's castle, Mursell,' Grace said when they reached the principal entrance, down the steps of which two picturesque mediæval serving-men came at their approach.

'Is Sir Geoffrey Harbord at home?'

'What name?'

'Is he at home?'

'Sir Geoffrey never receives in the forenoon.'

'Is he at home?'

'No.'

'When will he be at home?'

'Eh? George? She wants to know when he'll be at home?' the man cried to the other with a wink.

'The master's never at home to some people,' George shouted back with an answering wink that the visitor never saw, because, waving the first man aside, she bounded up the steps and stood in the wide hall, where more picturesque servants appeared, and a similar parley was held.

'Tell Sir Geoffrey I want to see him at his earliest convenience,' she said at last, after receiving her card back with a 'Not at home.'

'And shall I say the Queen o' Sheba?'

'Mursell,' she said to her faithful attendant as she pressed on, 'there must be some mistake. My grandfather cannot live in this place with all this rabble about him.'

''Tis th' ode pleece, Miss Greece, no mistake. But this hall is new.'

'Will ye be so good as to go away, yoong leddy,' said one of the men, just as Jack Dorrien's observant eye caught sight of a pale face peeping through the chink of a half-opened door. Feigning not to see this, she edged with a rapid backward movement towards it, and with a sudden strong turn opened it, entered, and found herself face to face with a shrinking, quivering, white-faced man, who would have vanished through another door but that he knew he would have been followed.

'Surely this is Mr. Hythe,' she said sweetly.

'My name is Hythe-Harbord,' he replied coldly, having collected himself, and decided to face the situation. 'May I ask to whom I owe——'

'Then it is our cousin, Brinson Hythe,' she interrupted; 'I am Grace Dorrien. I am sorry to come in this unceremonious way; there was no help for it. Do sit down,' she added, as he continued to stand, though she had selected the chair she liked best. 'How are you?'

'Miss Dorrien? Alone? Mursell, your maid, outside? Really? Pardon me, madam, but it is no unusual thing for impostors——'

'Nonsense, Cousin Brinson; you know perfectly well who I am, and you must have recognised Mursell. What is the use of all this humbug? Come in, Mursie dear, and show yourself.'

Brinson continued to stand, coldly eyeing Mursell, to whose old-fashioned curtsey and 'Good morning, sir, I hope I see you well,' he returned a freezing silence.

'Tell my cousin who I am, Mursell,' she said. 'I suppose this gentleman to be Mr. Brinson Hythe, my mother's constant correspondent and old familiar friend.'

Mursell made the cousins formally known to each other, and explained how her young lady came to be there; but Brinson still stood, coldly irresolute but watchful, while Grace lost not a scintillation of his eye or a quiver of his features.

'So, my dear cousin,' she said, with an angelic smile, 'you at last have the pleasure you have so long desired—of seeing your dear Carrie's eldest child face to face. I fear the sudden joy has been too much for you. You appear to be stunned with rapture.'

'Absolutely stunned,' he replied, recovering himself with an agreeable smile and an offer of his hand; 'you exactly explain the situation. The pleasure is—you see—so unusual, so absolutely unlooked-for. I hope you did not think me rude,' he added, with tenderest solicitude.

'Rude?' she returned, with a smile that quite misled him. 'Oh! not rude, Cousin Brinson, that is not the word. I know you too well from your genial letters to my mother, and what my friends remember of you, to suppose you capable of anything but the warmest friendship to the child of the love-match you so kindly effected.'

He looked older than she had expected; his hair was grizzled; there were many lines in his face, an intricate network of fine wrinkles about the eyes, the mobile, subtle mouth was hidden by the then unusual moustache, justified by the commission he held in the yeomanry cavalry; he was well made, slim, and straight, though his movements were languid and his postures lounging;

his deep-sunk eyes, restless and quick as they were, conveyed an expression of watchfulness and secret terror.

He was, on his part, surprised at the aspect of his young cousin, who was in her best looks this morning, with eyes like stars, delicately flushed, velvety cheeks, and firm crimson mouth. Her dress, he had to admit, was both suitable and becoming; her supple figure swayed gracefully above billows of fresh, cool-looking muslin; a simple straw hat, shading the eyes, and adorned with a curling white ostrich feather, crowned a well-carried head and stylishly dressed hair. No trace of fastness, vulgarity, or affectation. She knew how to sit down in a costume not easy to sit or even move in with decency, much less grace.

'Let me say, dear Miss Dorrien—might I say Grace?'—he murmured in a warm, velvety voice—'how *very* great a pleasure it is to me to see my cousin's child—grown into a—a vision—of such—really—such astonishing—ah—loveliness, if I may be permitted to use the word.'

'I am considered a thorough Harbord,' she returned, 'even more so than my mother, who favours the Garennes. But tell me, my dear cousin, how is it that my grandfather surrounds himself with such a set of ruffians? One would think this the enchanted castle of some dreadful ogre, rather than the home of a respectable country gentleman. I came in almost by force, stopped at every turn by rude flunkeys.'

'Rude? My dear child, surely the men were not rude to you. Oh, how very sorry I am! But in what way?' he asked anxiously; 'and which men were rude?'

'All of them. Some brought rude messages from my grandfather, some returned my card. All without exception barred my way and tried to stop me almost by force.'

'Really? How very annoying! How grieved I am that this should have happened! But, my dear cousin, why did you risk this unfortunate—this most unfortunate—visit without asking my advice first?' She smiled behind her handkerchief, and looked down for a moment at this. 'Do you know that you have made an irrevocable false step? You have taken the very worst possible course. You have contrived to set your grandfather finally against you. You little know his character, his absolute implacability. You actually sent in your card, you say. And he returned it? Well, my dear cousin, that is absolutely final. He will never change now. Your best course—nay, your only course—is to leave this place as quickly as possible, unless you wish to alienate him still more from your parents. Besides, Sir Geoffrey

is a man of very strong character. I—really, my dear Grace—I don't know what he may do; he is capable of——'

'*Capable de tout*, like Habbakuk? He must be a very unpleasant person to live with, Cousin Brinson. How good of you to stay so long in his house!'

He looked darkly at her with a green glitter in his shadowed eyes that boded no good; she saw that his judgment was in suspense. 'What, after all, is there to be capable of?' she added. 'Are there any *oubliettes* in Hardwin? Can he throw me into a dungeon? or hunt me with bloodhounds? If he eats me up alive, he must.'

'Dear Grace,' he said very earnestly, 'my uncle is not a man to jest with. His displeasure is not a thing to laugh at.'

'And yet you choose to pass your life with this terrible man?'

He rose with a gesture of impatience and looked out of the window.

'You are but a child,' he said, turning back with a look of cold contempt; 'but you might understand that there is such a thing as duty.'

'And self-sacrifice, Cousin Brinson. I quite see it; I fully appreciate the noble devotion with which you stand in my mother's place to receive the brunt of my grandfather's tyranny and cruelty. We should all be grateful to you for this. No wonder your poor little son is so unwell. Surely there is no necessity to sacrifice him?'

The green glitter was very perceptible; the whole face and form of the man quivered at the allusion. He paused with a silent, piercing gaze at his cousin, whose face wore an expression of seraphic sweetness and guilelessness that reassured him.

'You are young,' he observed, with a tolerant sigh; 'you cannot be expected to be wise. Take my advice, as your mother has done—and you will not repent.'

'My mother took your advice, Cousin Brinson, to her deep sorrow and undoing. So I shall take my own. I am not afraid of my grandfather, and I have a right to see him. Take me to him, or bring him to me.'

He smiled a pitying smile. 'Poor child! you little know what you ask,' he murmured.

'Oh yes, I do! I ask to see my grandfather, and I have a right to see him. You can't mean to suggest that he would treat me with violence; if he did, you could easily protect me. Ah!' she cried, as a billow of organ music surged into the room, 'who is playing? Pray have a little common-sense, Brinson, and

remember that my poor old grandfather cannot be more alienated from us than he is. My mother has been married twenty-one years, and has never received so much as a message from him in answer to her repeated letters. He has never taken the slightest notice of any one of us, not even of my poor little brother—either of his birth or his death. All this time he has expressed his intention of disinheriting us. What more can he do to harm us?'

'You know so little of life, dear Grace. As I have so often told your dear mother, your one chance is—patience.'

The music rolled on in contrapuntal progression from splendour to splendour; Grace appeared to be charmed into silence; her gaze became dreamy; it explored the wide stretch of sunny landscape shown through the window. Presently she looked up, when the organ was booming softly like distant sea surges.

'Will you or will you not introduce me to my grandfather?' she said; 'I intend to see him one way or another.'

'I will not,' he replied firmly; 'I have far too warm a regard for the interests of dear Carrie's child.'

'That is final then,' she said, rising. 'Good-bye, Cousin Brinson.'

'Stay,' he cried, as she turned to leave, 'what are your plans, and where are you going?'

'I am going back to lunch; it must be high time. As for my plans, they have yet to be made. Good-bye. Pray don't give yourself the trouble of coming out, Mr. Hythe.'

Mr. Hythe-Harbord gallantly chose to accompany his pretty young cousin through the quadrangle and archway, and even some distance down the gravel sweep that led to the principal entrance. They passed the kennels of some chained mastiffs, which had barked at their approach. Mr. Hythe-Harbord let fall the observation that these dogs were unchained at night, and related a pleasing anecdote of a tramp, who had been pinned by the throat to a wall all one night by one of them, adding that this unfortunate tramp had been found only just alive and bereft of reason in the morning.

'Mursie dear,' Grace said, as they wound down the steep descent, 'sing me "The sun shines fair on Carlisle Wall."'

CHAPTER VI

'WHAT a delightful creature Mr. Hythe-Harbord is, Mursell!' her young lady observed, after long and thoughtful silence, as they

wound back to the village, 'almost more pleasant than you led me to expect. Is he much changed?'

'Nay, but after a score of years, missie, who isna? Ay, he always had they taking ways.'

'No wonder that they took our inheritance. Such a loyal, unselfish nature! How far would you trust him?'

'How far would I no? Mr. Brinson was always true. I doubt ye would never have been born but for him, dearie.'

'Well, Mr. Metcalfe, what did you tell Mr. Hythe-Harbord about us?' Grace asked of the landlord when they reached the inn, at the door of which he was standing.

'I—I—I telled him no harm, miss,' he stammered, flushing.

'Of course not. But just exactly what did you tell him?'

'Nay, miss, I did but—joost send him the neemes of the visitors. Mr. Hythe-Harbord always likes to know who is here.'

'That was so kind of you. One is so charmed to be expected and prepared for. There, Mursell. Think it over. My cousin was good enough to prepare that charming reception for me.'

Two hours later a servant brought a letter for Miss Dorrien, a charming composition, beginning, 'My dear Grace,' and ending 'Your affectionate cousin, Brinson Hythe-Harbord,' the purport of which was that Sir Geoffrey, much angered by his granddaughter's unwelcome visit, had taken one of his sudden decisions to leave England for some German baths, much recommended for Mrs. Hythe-Harbord's health. The writer offered to visit her at the *White Hart*, either on that evening or the next.

To this letter he received no answer. He therefore appeared uninvited at the inn between six and seven to pay his respects to his cousin, who was not there. She left, the landlord told him, between three and four for Kendal; the fly that took her was timed to catch the 4.30 express to Kendal; the luggage was labelled in the old-fashioned way, 'Miss Dorrien, Passenger to Kendal.'

'Sensible girl,' Mr. Hythe-Harbord reflected, as he swung himself into his saddle and rode leisurely home by a roundabout way that he might enjoy the sweetness of the closing day. 'She is pert, and fancies herself clever. Not out of her teens yet. Inclined to distrust Cousin Brinson, but reassured by his cordiality. So much for fast Jack Dorrien. I must write and remonstrate with her dear mamma to-night.'

This befell on Tuesday evening. On Thursday morning Mr. Hythe-Harbord rode over to a lodge in a plantation about seven miles off to receive a shooting party. The party was to shoot

on the distant side of the lodge, whence luncheon was to be sent out, and where horses were stabled. It was possible that Mr. Hythe-Harbord might even dine and pass the night there. At the earliest he was not expected at Hardwin before seven.

Though not a keen sportsman, he liked to carry a gun over turnips and stubble-fields with sporting friends in pleasant autumn weather; he liked an open-air luncheon, making it a longer function than ardent sportsmen cared for; he enjoyed his ride through wood and park, up hill and down dale, over a beautiful country lightly veiled in soft amethystine mist; he dearly liked to feel his splendid young chestnut bound lightly beneath him, head down, mouth sensitive to the lightest touch. Surely he was a happy man. The young servant, belted, booted, and top-hatted, who rode behind him, and was perfectly happy without knowing it, considered his master at the summit of earthly bliss. Care rode behind each horseman, nevertheless.

Sir Geoffrey had come to lean so much upon his adopted son, that he felt a little lost even during a day's absence. He shot over nearer covers with enjoyment himself, though he had never been a keen sportsman; but he never cared to shoot in hot sunshine, and had almost given up partridges. His habits were so methodical that it was possible to know what he was doing at almost any hour of the day. A former maid, married to a keeper, who lived in Bosson Wood, would say to her husband—

'Sir Geoffrey's at the organ now,' or 'He'll be in the rose-garden at this time.' Her daughter, now occupying her mother's former place at Hardwin, would corroborate her. Bosson Wood was but a mile and a half from the Hall, so that Janie Steele was often in and out of the keeper's pretty cottage, which was large enough to admit lodgers in summer-time.

On this Thursday forenoon Sir Geoffrey was in his study, which opened on a rose-garden with a sundial and clipped yew-hedges. Leading from this garden on the north, was an avenue of lime-trees with rustic seats beneath their shade. In this room Sir Geoffrey would read or write, going in and out, sometimes in the sunny, sheltered rose-garden, sometimes in the cool, green gloom of the linden-walk, according to the weather. Mrs. Dorrien had often talked of this rose-garden and the linden-walk; her children knew well how those lindens were cut—the root-growth of brush left to veil the trunks from the ground to the principal limbs. In some places there was but a square opening like a window between the trees; the general effect

was of gothic arches supporting a vaulted roof on heavy pillars of solid green.

Autumn had now mellowed this green leafage to golden glory; the mossed pathway beneath was almost carpeted with fallen leaves; yet bees and other insects still hummed in the sunny boughs, and the rustling breeze among the branches still kept a summer tone.

Sir Geoffrey had wearied of his desk; the robin's song and twitter of circling swallows, the scent of late roses and sound of whetted scythes, invited him forth. The *Souvenir de Malmaison* was in full autumn blow; he gathered a beautiful, stiff-curled bud and put it in his coat. Butterflies danced, regardless of approaching doom, over the roses and about the dial.

'*Animula vagula, blandula,*' he repeated softly, adding after a pause—

'*Liebes, leichtes, luft'ges Ding,*
Schmetterling.'

The gnomon cast a sharp black shadow on the dial this clear, bright day; it pointed very near to noon. As he read the inscription round the dial, suddenly, in the bright noon light, the whole weight of his years fell upon him; he knew that he was old, and his remaining days 'swifter than a weaver's shuttle.'

Old and very lonely, a worn and weary pilgrim in the paths that end, however variously they begin and continue, alike in the grave. 'Yes, very lonely; a poor, forsaken old man,' he told himself, with a piteous shake of the head. The wife of his youth down there in the churchyard; his only child twenty-one years lost, rebellious and impenitent; only Brinson left—Brinson and his youngest boy. Pippin was growing up; in years he was fourteen, in mind four; Amy, the hapless mother, still led her scared and sorrowful life. A peacock strutted down the close-cut sward, spreading his many-eyed tail in his master's sight.

'Oh, display; oh, pride! This is the vainest of all vain vanities,' the old man murmured.

There stood his beautiful palace of art, whither through the trees he could see people flocking to see and admire, this being an open day; and there spread his wide, wide lands, marked everywhere by the impress of his strong mind and hand. But here he stood, alone and deserted in his age. The peacock spread his jewelled, velvety fan in vain before his master, the glancing purple of his neck and proud little head had no power to charm; the tail dropped in a long, trailing bundle, the bird crouched in a sunny nook, scooped himself a dust-bath, and drowsed.

Sir Geoffrey left the roses to open their hearts to the sun, and passed into the cool, still arcades under the linden boughs; softly and slowly he paced the sylvan cloister, his head bent in musing, his hands clasped behind him, thoughts stirring deeply in his soul.

He was more angry than surprised, this being a public day, to find his solitude invaded by a feminine presence; for, looking up angrily at the rustle of a light step over fallen leaves, he saw a young lady approaching him. As she walked, broken lights and dappled leaf shadows changed on the billows of fresh muslin on which she seemed to swim. When a sunbeam touched the warm crimson of her mouth, shot along the ripples of her hair, danced on a well-gloved hand and an arched foot, and reflected itself from a pair of bright eyes, the frown on Sir Geoffrey's face began to smooth itself out, and he had to admit to himself that the intruder added much to the beauty of those whispering shades.

She stepped lightly along, her head up, an easy smile, a certain repressed daring, in the vivid face and unembarrassed glance that pleased the old man.

'Good morning,' she said, with a slight bow, when they met; 'I'm afraid I'm trespassing here; I managed to lose my way.'

Sir Geoffrey's picturesque felt hat had been removed, almost before her accost, with the ceremonious care of older times, while he regretted that she had lost herself, adding that her misfortune was his luck, since it provided him with the presence of a charming young lady.

'It is like a dream, or a chapter out of a fairy book,' she replied. 'How can people help losing their way in this enchanted place? I had no idea that Hardwin was so magnificent. It looks as if raised by enchantment. Or like Troy, rising into towers like a mist to Apollo's song.'

Something in this young creature's fresh and pure voice, and something, too, in her look, troubled Sir Geoffrey vaguely. His pulse quickened, such a tremor ran through him, that he was minded to sit and rest, and invited his accidental guest to take a place with him on a rustic seat at the foot of one of the green columns. This she did without demur; he sat in the angle of the seat, his face towards her.

'Have you been over the galleries yet?' he asked. 'Did you come from a distance?'

Not from a distance; she was staying in the neighbourhood with her maid, an old family servant, who was bred in the north country, and had even known Sir Geoffrey in her youth.

'More know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows. Have I seen you before? Ought I to know you?'

'You have never seen me before, Sir Geoffrey, and yet I think that you ought to know me.'

'You speak in riddles, young lady. I too am inclined to think this not my own familiar linden walk, but a green alley of fairyland, into which I have wandered unconsciously this morning. Am I addressing Egeria? Or is it Titania herself? Too well grown for the fairy queen. Rather one of those daughters of the gods encountered by our young Poet Laureate in the magic wood of his "Dream of Fair Women."'

'"I have no men to govern in this wood," was Cleopatra's only woe. Helen seemed content with the mischief she had done in life. Dear sir, I appreciate your chivalrous courtesy to a nameless intruder—but—and——'

'You remember that it is unusual for young gentlewomen to walk alone?'

'My maid is within call. I—I—I hope you won't be much startled—but—but the honest truth is that I came on purpose to call on you. I felt that, as I was staying in the neighbourhood, I ought either to let you know where I was, or call. Finally, considering our relationship——'

'Our *what*, madam?' he shouted, rising and gazing with knitted brows upon his young guest.

'I thought it would be more graceful for me to call,' she continued, also rising to confront him; 'therefore I chose the forenoon, so as to find you alone. Dear grandfather, I am *so* glad to see you at last. Please kiss me. My name is Grace Harbord Dorrien.'

A light hand was on Sir Geoffrey's right shoulder, another on his left arm, a fresh young face was uplifted to his. It was many, many years since any young woman, nay, any woman—for Mrs. Brinson had gradually dropped the custom—had kissed him; he felt the natural yearning of age to youth, and the natural thrill of kindred blood; but his massive head did not bend, his folded arms remained rigid, his fiery dark eyes blazed with anger upon his granddaughter.

'Do you mean to say, madam, that you are your mother's daughter?' he thundered.

'Such is my firm belief, dear grandfather,' she replied, not withdrawing the soft touch and undaunted gaze; 'I am also my grandfather's granddaughter, I have heard.'

'And you dare to come here uninvited?'

'Of course I do. Why not? I have a right to be here, in my grandfather's house, in my mother's old home. And you ought to be glad to see me and to give me a proper welcome.'

'Oh! I ought, ought I?' he growled, with a softened fierceness; 'I'm to be taught by my grandchildren, eh?'

'Wise men may learn even from fools. Why should you be rude and unkind to me, dear grandfather? I never harmed you. I have always felt kindly towards you. I was always attracted to you. There is no quarrel between *us*.'

'I have no daughter, Miss Dorrien; therefore I can have no granddaughter.'

'The syllogism is imperfect. Supposing you have no daughter—though I deny it—you cannot deny that you *had* one once. Well, she had a daughter and—well, I'm *her*—I mean her daughter. I have done the most courteous thing I could think of—ventured to call and pay my respects to my mother's father; I have a right to be received with courtesy. I was always led to suppose that Sir Geoffrey Harbord was a gentleman. I am sure he is not an ogre. I'm not a bit afraid of him, whatever people say of him.'

'Pray, madam, are you afraid of anything?' he asked. 'I see no sign of fear. At all events, you appear to have some sense.'

'I am not an idiot, nor am I a monster,' she replied, resuming her seat, and observing the faint tremor those words sent over the old man's strong, dark face. 'I'm glad I called; you would certainly have had reason to feel hurt if I had left without paying my respects.'

Sir Geoffrey burst into one of his leonine roars of laughter, and took a seat beside her.

'*L'audace, l'audace, et toujours l'audace*,' he cried, when he had quieted down. 'Danton knew human nature, Miss Grace. And, pray, may I ask where are you stopping?'

'At a keeper's cottage in Bosson Wood; Steele is the name. Jane Mursell is with me. My father having gone abroad on urgent business, and the rest of the family being at Newcourt, and Cousin Emma being unable to receive me, I am rusticating in the charge of Mursell, a faithful old servant, a sort of second mother to us children. So I took the opportunity to pass this way and call.'

'A second she-Judas,' Sir Geoffrey growled, while his granddaughter chatted affably about the north country and lakeland and the joys of rustic simplicity.

Then it seemed the most natural thing in the world for them

to rise and stroll about the rose-garden—where Mursell was discovered, tremblingly waiting, frowned upon by Sir Geoffrey, to whom she made her best curtsey—and look at the sundial, read its inscription, and admire the roses, some of which were gathered and placed in the young lady's hand, and by her were tucked into her belt. Thence the pair naturally wandered into the study by the open French window.

'I needn't ask what room this is; it must be your study, it's so untidy,' the visitor observed, glancing round at papers, books, sketches, bills, and account-books, strewn in every direction, on chairs, tables, and sofas.

'Scarcely a room to ask a lady into,' Sir Geoffrey apologised, leading the way thence through a corridor to a bright and dainty apartment that bore traces of female occupation, Grace observing that she preferred the study; it was more friendly and homelike. This remark was emphasised by a filial and quite matter-of-course kiss on the old man's dark face, and a little affectionate pat on his square shoulder, caresses received passively, with a sort of surly amazement.

Between ten and eleven o'clock on that memorable Thursday night, fast Jack Dorrien, robed in a white dressing-gown, with her hair tumbling over her shoulders, found herself in one of the most beautiful of the guest-chambers at Hardwin, one of a suite of four, sitting and bedroom, bath and maid's room, each more delightful in its way than the other. Mursell, with a hair-brush, stood, the picture of despair tempered by reluctant laughter, vainly requesting her mistress to sit down and be brushed. Anticipating the modern accomplishment of skirt-dancing, Miss Dorrien, a corner of her voluminous white robe in each hand, and her hair flying, was whirling madly round the room to a wild song of triumph.

'It is too stunning,' she chanted; 'I must dance for joy. I 'm a butterfly, look,' pausing with a whirl of white wings; 'I 'm a peony,' her hair flying out like flower petals; 'I 'm Deborah! Ha! ha! Mursie, you wouldn't believe it. Why don't you jump for joy?'

''Deed, then, it 's saying prayers ye ought to be and giving of thanks, missie, instead of dancing like a yoong heathen,' grumbled Mursell.

'It 's very religious to dance for joy, Mursell. David danced before the ark. So did the damsels with the timbrels,' she chanted with madder and madder whirls, in the midst of which Mursell was approached, seized, and danced twice, in spite of

protestations, struggles, and cries of 'I kennot bayre it, I kennot bayre it,' round the room, then dropped, panting, in a chair, kissed, and bidden finish her task of hair-brushing, which she did with much preaching and grumbling, heard in meek silence by the 'yoong leddy,' who was rapidly pencilling the following note, received with rapture two days after at Baden-Baden by Colonel Dorrien:—

'HARDWIN HALL, *Sept.* 1857.

'DEAR DAD,—Metcalfe a spy. First advance on position disastrous, mined by forewarned garrison. Succeeded in penetrating outworks, fierce encounter with garrison, repulsed with great slaughter. Camp abandoned; feigned retreat on Kendal. Garrison lulled to security. *Ruse de guerre.* Secret advance and occupation of Bosson Wood. Spies in garrison. Secretly advanced on linden walk and study. Surprised *Governor*; brisk engagement; Governor surrendered at discretion. Garrison capitulated. Am occupying porphyry suite. B.H. column expected to-morrow. Probable hot engagement.

'G. H. D.'

'Clever young scoundrel! Why didn't she write more fully?' he chuckled. 'What *can* she mean by B.H. column? Not Brinson Hythe? Hythe was always our friend in need. Gad, she can't mean that old Hythe sneaks. Honest old Brinson a Judas? Not a bit of it. Some mad nonsense of Jack's. What a headpiece the young rascal has!'

Recalling the triumphs of that arduous day, and marvelling at her good fortune, Jack Dorrien could not sleep in the excitement of being a welcome guest in her grandfather's stately home. It was far beyond what she could have expected at the first meeting. Even to find herself at luncheon under the Persephone ceiling seemed too great a triumph.

She had just begun to think of the propriety of rising to take leave in the forenoon, when the faded and scared Mrs. Hythe-Harbord entered the room.

'Amy, my dear,' Sir Geoffrey then said, to the terror and amazement of that poor lady, 'let me present my eldest granddaughter, your cousin Grace. As she is staying in our neighbourhood, my granddaughter was civil enough to walk over to luncheon with us.'

Scarcely had Mrs. Hythe-Harbord shuddered through this, to her, dreadful introduction, when a clear voice was heard singing sweetly along the corridor, and Pippin came in and stopped, transfixed by amazement. The poor boy had grown into a fine, strong-looking lad of fourteen, without losing his singular grace. His curls were now shortened to a brown mop with golden lights

and an aureole effect round his delicately rosed, angel face. A low broad collar, a velvet coat, with crimson necktie and white waistcoat, gave him a somewhat picturesque appearance.

'My adopted grandson, Philip Harbord Hythe-Harbord,' Sir Geoffrey said. 'Come, Pippin, don't be afraid. Come and speak to your Cousin Grace.'

Poor Pippin, all eyes and blushes, stepped forward at this and accepted the hand offered him. Then he repeated melodiously—

> 'Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicean barks of yore,

his wide, wistful blue eyes fixed upon her face with deep admiration.

Flushed with triumph, strung to highest pitch, decked with crimson roses, the damask of which was scarcely as soft as her own cheeks and lips, Grace was in her best looks. An exultant thrill shot through Sir Geoffrey at sight of the graceful pair; and when Grace, whose eyes had softened, and whose firm, wilful mouth quivered at sight of the poor boy, said gently, 'Thank you, Cousin Philip,' and turned quickly away, he coughed and grumbled savagely at Mrs. Hythe-Harbord, to her final and total bewilderment, and told Pippin, with a softened roughness, to be quiet and lead his cousin in to luncheon, which he did with the utmost propriety.

The lovely lady over the chimney-piece smiled the kindest welcome upon the young guest, who received her penetrating gaze and warm smile with pleased surprise.

'My grandmother and namesake, without doubt,' she said, with a little bow towards the picture.

'Oh! yes!—ah! Lady Grace—Lady Grace Harbord,' Mrs. Hythe-Harbord stammered fearfully, with furtive glances at Sir Geoffrey, who looked from the fresh bloom of the living face to that of the pictured one that had been so long dust in dust. Only the living are alive, after all, according to Heine. The living face set all sorts of long-forgotten joys and pains stirring within Sir Geoffrey.

'I'm not a bit like her; I've always been scolded for it and called a regular Harbord—just as if I had done it on purpose,' Grace added. 'I wish you could see my sister, grandfather; she's a Garenne, like my mother, but more like my grandmother.'

'Eh? Like Lady Grace, is she? What name?' he asked, with a tremulous interest.

'Laura. She's very pretty. Grandpapa, you *would* like Laura. She's not quite eighteen, with golden hair and the sweetest

blue eyes. She's the good one. She's never in a scrape. Laura is mother's girl.'

'The good one, eh? Never in a scrape? Hm! Somebody else is the bad one. Somebody else is in a scrape, hey?'

'Of course, I'm the bad one. I'm always in a scrape. As for Laura, she's almost too good to live—like girls in story-books, who all die young.'

'Really? Hm!' Sir Geoffrey helped himself to salad and asked for a wine not in the room; when it came, he said to the picturesque seneschal, 'Send for Miss Dorrien's trunks, and tell Mrs. Rere to prepare the porphyry suite for my granddaughter and her maid.'

'But—Cousin Amy—perhaps—is it quite convenient to receive me?' she asked of the ashen white and startled hostess.

'Charmed—delighted,' the poor woman stammered. 'Mr. Hythe-Harbord—agreeably surprised, I am sure—home from shooting this evening.'

Jack Dorrien smiled rather grimly at the prospective surprise to be sprung upon Cousin Brinson.

'So Laura is the mother's favourite, eh?' Sir Geoffrey said in the afternoon, which was spent in going over the private apartments, gardens, and pleasaunces.

'Yes; Mother spoils her, but Dad spoils me, so it's all square.'

'And what was the last scrape, pray?'

'Coming here, and a pretty big one it is.'

Sir Geoffrey stopped on the terraced walk and let the cigar his granddaughter had lighted for him drop upon the coping of a low wall.

'You are here,' he asked, 'without your mother's permission?'

'Without her knowledge. I did not ask her permission, because I was sure she would withhold it.' Sir Geoffrey's dark face darkened and his mouth hardened at this. 'But it's all right; my father knows,' she added.

'Ah, he does,' with a kind of snarl; 'I dare say. And what did he say about it?'

'Oh, he gave me his blessing, said I was a clever young blackguard, told me to mind my P's and Q's, and practise saying prunes and prisms for a week beforehand. It's not often poor old Dad comes the heavy father like that. He knows I won't stand anything but a light hand on the bit.'

'Ah! and does he give you lessons in slang?'

'Good gracious, I forgot. He told me that one word of slang would upset the family apple-cart—I mean—*he* said apple-cart, he's a man and was in the cavalry.'

Sir Geoffrey looked thoughtfully over wooded hills and vales and shining oat-plots, all basking in autumn afternoon sun; the neglected cigar went out, and the 'clever young blackguard' sorely feared that she had occasioned the catastrophe apprehended by her father, until the old man burst into a bitter kind of laugh and walked on.

'It's not,' he observed presently, 'exactly an overwhelming honour to be grandfather of a fast Jack Dorrien.'

'Still less,' added Miss Dorrien meekly, 'is it delightful to be traduced and nicknamed, dear grandpapa.'

'Prunes and prisms, Miss Dorrien! Pray, may I ask why my eldest granddaughter was locked in her room at Southsea on prison diet?'

'I am sorry to say, grandpapa, that she had spoken unbecomingly to her mother on being reproved for flirting at a dance. She was then younger by—at least six weeks. She's older now, and —perhaps—a little wiser. But what little bird brought that little tale?

Sir Geoffrey deigned no response; though, from the manner in which he walked and resumed his cigar, the astute damsel supposed him to be pacified.

'Ah, my dear,' he said later on, 'if I had practised a little judicious locking-up, you would never have seen the light'—which she thought would have been a great pity.

'It's the world's fault,' she said presently; so he asked what and why.

'That girls are fast,' was the gloomy answer. 'Unless they say nothing but niminy piminy, and do nothing but sit still, looking like donkeys and waiting till they are asked, they are called fast.'

'Oh!' said Sir Geoffrey, stopping and scrutinising her clouded face for a few seconds, after which he said, 'Ah!' and walked on, evidently thinking a good deal, but of what, the sharp young woman by his side had not the remotest idea.

When the quaggas, zebras, antelopes, and other exotic creatures had been seen, and the difficulty of acclimatising them explained, and Sir Geoffrey had ignominiously fled for his life before the onset of a sturdy little Brahmin bull, while Grace had narrowly escaped from the pursuit of an irritated reindeer, he was thanked for showing so many things, and it was suggested that he must be tired.

'It is time I contributed some entertainment. Shall I fetch my guitar and sing?'

'Thank you, I am a bit of a musician myself,' with a wry face.

'Oh, I know, I heard you at the organ on Tuesday.'

'You were here on Tuesday? And I not told?'

'You were said to be engaged.'

'Oh! And you lost your way into the linden-walk with a plan of Hardwin in your pocket and Mursell at your side.'

'Singular. It is a crooked world. One can't always speak *au pied de la lettre.* Tact and *savoir faire* are buttressed on judicious fibs—white ones.'

'Lady Chesterfield the younger. Wrong, Grace, wrong. This taint is inherited. But for lies I should never have been the childless, deserted old man I am.'

They had now reached the great central hall, through the stained west windows of which, long shafts of burning colour fell on marble pillar and mosaic wall-space, on gleaming white statues, on pictures and busts, on trophies of arms ancient and modern, on cabinets and curios, on the gorgeously coloured pipes of the great organ, that rose majestically into the domed roof.

'Forgive her, dear grandfather,' she pleaded under sudden irresistible impulse. 'Forgive her. She repents.'

'It is a lie,' he cried fiercely, with a brusque movement away from her, and a glance so savage that she lost colour, though she did not lower her eyes. Then, with a few rapid steps, he was at the organ, storming away in a splendid tumult that gradually calmed and died into silence. After a short pause, during which he seemed lost in reverie, Sir Geoffrey placed some music on the stand and began to play from it, when Grace appeared at his side and drew out the stops, to his great contentment.

'Now for a big scrimmage, Mursie,' she said next morning, when Mursell was brushing her hair. 'There's a bad bit coming. Nothing can put it off but the sudden death of one of us three.'

At the same time she knew that the mere fact of having slept one night under her grandfather's roof was a lasting advantage.

Even Sir Geoffrey was conscious of some trepidation in face of his nephew's return. He had been very glad of the thick autumn mist of the previous night, because it kept Brinson away. A vague compunction, arising partly from the fact that a pretty, lively, and affectionate girl, not devoid of intelligence, not wholly unversed in literature, was a pleasanter companion than a middle-aged man of many cares, and partly from the fact that it seemed a lifetime since Brinson rode away in the sunshine, troubled him, together with the discovery that he was becoming not only dependent on the virtual master of Hardwin, but also considerably afraid of that amiable being. It is ever thus; age

resembles infancy in its dependence; the old lean upon their juniors; they cannot afford to risk the excitement of domestic friction. Obedience is the key of peace. Still, Sir Geoffrey was not going to be bullied in his own house—not he; besides, Brinson would, of course, be delighted to see his charming young cousin. Who so anxious as he to bring about a family reconciliation?

Ah! but during the wakeful watches of the night, this bitter fact stared the old man in the face—Grace was no messenger of submission and forgiveness; Carrie not only did not know of her coming, but would have forbidden it had she known. Well, she had bereft him of a daughter; here was a prospect of being even with her. The child who featured the Garennes was her favourite; Grace's Harbord nature was even held to be a crime. Poor child, so charming, so clever, so beautiful, but so ill trained! Called a blackguard by her father, and urged on by him, the base money-hunter, to creep into the wealthy grandsire's good graces, and that against the mother's evident wishes; poor child, trained to the very same kind of deception on herself that the mother had practised on him. Grace must be snatched from these ill surroundings; she was still young and plastic; she would develop into a superb woman.

Thus breakfast was taken in tremors, shared by all three—Sir Geoffrey, Grace, and Mrs. Brinson. Pippin and his tutor, Reginald and his governess, breakfasted in unclouded calm, offering a welcome medium of indifference to the secretly agitated trio.

The morning passed, the clock in the central tower boomed out solemnly over the quiet countryside the twelve hours of noon, amid a chorus of variously chiming and striking clocks all over the great building, when the virtual master of that house and of all Sir Geoffrey's houses and households, lands and possessions, rode up to the door by which he usually entered, sprang lightly from his horse, and walked, cheerily singing to himself, into that sunny morning room which served as focus to the family at this hour.

'Home is home be it never so homely,' Mr. Hythe-Harbord thought to himself, when his gaze fell upon the beautiful proportions and exquisite adornments of the corridor, while his ear was pleasantly touched by sounds of music and singing, sounds that ceased abruptly when he opened the door and gazed straight into the demure face of Grace with the amazed ejaculation—

'*You* here?'

CHAPTER VII

'DELIGHTFUL, is it not?' was Miss Dorrien's benign response to her cousin's welcome. 'I have been looking forward all the morning to the lovely surprise in store for you.'

Those who have crossed the Channel upon a choppy sea, without succumbing until others have paid the melancholy tribute exacted by Father Neptune from inept votaries, have seen such a hue upon the faces of the latter as was now visible upon the countenance of Mr. Hythe-Harbord.

The scene that met the astounded gaze of this unfortunate gentleman was not in itself revolting. Sir Geoffrey, who was accustomed at this hour to be in his study or its exit—the rose-garden and linden-walk—was now sitting on a sofa, his arms on a light table before him, his chin on his hands, his often gloomy face alight with happiness and pleasure, gazing upon his grand-daughter, who occupied a central position on a chair, and was singing to her guitar, 'The sun shines fair on Carlisle Wall.' On the carpet at her feet, looking up to her in rapt abstraction, poor Pippin, reclining on one arm and singing a second; leaning on her knee, and gazing with affectionate admiration upon her, the six-year-old Reginald; sitting at a harp, which she touched to strengthen the guitar accompaniment, was Mrs. Hythe-Harbord, the scare gone out of her worn face, and a look of mild satisfaction upon it. As for the central figure of this happy family group, in a simple morning gown with a fresh rose at her waist, she had the familiar and settled air of a daughter or even mistress of the house. Had she been born there, she could not have looked more absolutely at home.

> 'That wine she had not tasted well,
> (The sun shines fair on Carlisle Wall),
> When dead in her true love's arms she fell;
> For Love shall still be lord of all,'

she was singing, when Mr. Hythe-Harbord's entrance broke the harmony into jarring discord.

Sir Geoffrey removed his chin from his hands, his arms from the table, and sat up stiffly on his sofa; Pippin jumped up with a quiver on his angel face; Reginald started away, and then crept back close to his new cousin; Mrs. Hythe-Harbord paled and shuddered by her harp, from the strings of which her hands dropped helplessly.

Grace alone neither moved nor appeared to be moved; there was a daring, defiant glitter in her eye, her full crimson mouth was set firm, her cheek glowed with triumph. She had the advantage of being prepared; for she had not only rehearsed the scene all the morning in imagination, but her quick eye and ear had caught sight of distant horsemen through the trees and the thud of hoofs on turf and gravel. Poor Sir Geoffrey had not felt so guilty since full threescore years ago, when caught out in some boyish transgression and condemned to the Etonian *peine forte et dure* on the classic block. But this feeling soon gave place to one of blank amazement, mixed with a suspicion of betrayal at the unexpected greeting between the two cousins.

'Good Gad, Brinson!' he cried, 'how did you know this young lady? Where the devil did you meet your cousin?'

'Where, but in this house on Tuesday,' she replied for him, meeting the dark glance of her speechless cousin with contemptuous reassurance. 'When I called on Tuesday, my cousin received me in the kindest manner. He implored me not to attempt to see you until he had broken the fact of my being here. He hoped to propitiate you first. He was afraid you might not care to see me.'

'Desperately afraid,' corroborated Brinson, the green hue gradually leaving his face; 'I wanted to pave the way gently.'

'He thought the shock might be injurious to you,' she added.

'Quite so. I ventured to remind my cousin that, at your age, my dear sir, a shock might be fatal. And I feared that you might be rough to her.'

'Confound you, Brinson Hythe, for the biggest ass in the three kingdoms,' thundered Sir Geoffrey, whose countenance had darkened in proportion as his nephew's had cleared. 'Confound your infernal insolence for supposing I could be rude to any woman, in my own house, too, much less to my own grandchild. D'ye think I've no sense of chivalry? Am I a savage, a clown, a churl? Confound your——'

'Sir,' cried Brinson, with a dark flush, as the old man strode up to him with blazing eyes and threatening fist; while poor Mrs. Hythe-Harbord, gathering her scared young ones to her, precipitately fled the stormy scene. 'You forget——'

'How hot it is for such warm words,' Grace put in. 'Dear Grannie, you've sent the thermometer up at least ten degrees, and Brinson is half baked already with his hot ride.'

'Half-baked? That's just what he is. Beg your pardon, Grace,' he chuckled, the edge of his anger blunted at once. 'At my age? Why, I 'm good for another twenty years at least, Brinson.'

'Dear grandfather, I don't like this kind of thing,' Grace complained; 'it is not amusing. Never talk of people's ages to me.'

'I am sorry to be the innocent cause of the annoyance,' said Brinson, white with rage still.

'Were the birds shy yesterday?' Grace asked him, to change the subject.

'We had fair sport in spite of the sun,' he replied abstractedly.

'Rough! And to a woman!' Sir Geoffrey muttered sullenly. 'And in my own house!'

'You don't care for sport, grandfather? What a pity! I envy men their resources for killing time. One must kill something, it appears—hearts, birds, or time. But I thought you were going to show me your peaches, dear?'

'So I was, my dear. So I was. Where is your bonnet? Come then.'

Thus the noise of battle rolled away, dying into distant murmurs, and the combatants, hot and breathless, parted.

Conscious that she had scored well in every direction, and earned some measure of wrathful gratitude from a vanquished but still dangerous foe, Grace was fatigued and happy. She had been surprised by Sir Geoffrey's want of self-control; it scarcely seemed consistent with the steady concentrated anger of which she knew him capable. It furnished food for much subsequent thought.

Brinson wondered what would have happened if his uncle had known the true history of Tuesday forenoon. 'Fast Jack Dorrien knows too much and is a great deal too clever,' he reflected, admiring her dexterity in showing him a way out of his difficulty. 'A stroke of prudence to avoid an outward breach with an enemy who must, in that case, have crushed her or been crushed. Or is it cowardice? Not quite clever or brave enough, Miss Jack. You had the winning card in your hand, and you threw it away. "*L'audace, l'audace,*" is only for men; in crises women always show the white feather. Well, that's worth knowing. A girl not out of her teens ought to be easily cowed. I wonder how much that fool Amy knows of this?'

'Indeed, dear Brinson, I could not help it,' the poor lady stammered, on being questioned later. 'I was quite as much surprised as you when first I saw her in that very room. I had no suspicion even until Uncle Geoffrey introduced her.'

The luncheon table was not as gay and unconstrained as on

the first day. There was something in the smooth restraint and keen and piercing conversation of Mr. Hythe-Harbord, that prevented ease and kept attention too much on the alert.

There was a dinner party the same evening, every guest at which was surprised at the sudden apparition of a grown-up granddaughter, of whose existence some were unaware, though people in general remembered Carrie Harbord's runaway match, and the subsequent family rupture. The fraternal manner in which the cousins sang and played together that evening was edifying.

Still more edifying had been Brinson's efforts to amuse and entertain his cousin during the day. He joined her grandfather in showing her over galleries and all parts of the house and grounds open to the public on certain days.

Sir Geoffrey was charmed; it made him quite happy to see the cousins together on such amicable terms. He knew not which to admire most—Brinson's careful and brilliant description of the objects of art and interest collected, and lucid exposition of the principles and aims of the architecture, or Grace's intelligent and interested reception of the same. Relieved, and perhaps a little ashamed, by his explosion in the morning, he thought well to consign the imputation of roughness to total oblivion: he was content to walk silently by his granddaughter's side, occasionally throwing in an assent. Pippin, with dog-like devotion to his new housemate, trotted dog-like after her, sometimes crooning his own little songs to himself, and sometimes, in his eerie manner, throwing in apposite quotations.

After a general view and description of the whole of Hardwin, a clear treble voice at Grace's elbow repeated melodiously but too impressively—

'Full of long-sounding corridors it was,
That over-vaulted grateful gloom,
Thro' which the livelong day my soul did pass,
Well pleased, from room to room.'

This was startling, the more so as it chimed with inward remembrance of the same poem; but nobody noticed what was evidently an everyday occurrence.

Presently the party stopped in a pleasant silence on one of the lofty balconies overlooking a wide stretch of country, warm grey in the warm grey afternoon light, when the melodious voice again repeated, or rather chanted, with the same dreadful impressiveness—

'——So three years
She prospered: on the fourth she fell,
Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,
Struck through with pangs of hell,'

his voice dropping to his deepest note in hell. Grace thought to find a tortured flash in Brinson's eye and faint horror about his mouth; Sir Geoffrey looked as if his flesh crept, or some one was walking over his grave.

'What a tragedian Pip would make!' he said with an uneasy laugh. 'He gives one the shivers already.'

But when, after one of these quotations, Grace spoke to Pippin in continuance of the subject, there was no meaning in his vacant glance and lisping rejoinder—

'Whath artith?'

'Oh, Grannie dear!' she cried at the end of the afternoon's progress, with a warm-hearted childish caress, 'I feel like the Queen of Sheba. There 's no spirit left in me.'

'You should say that to old Brin, Grace,' he replied, well pleased; 'the credit, such as it is, is chiefly due to good old Brin.'

Brinson was about to deprecate this compliment, when the clear boy-voice began with solemn emphasis—

> 'But in dark corners of her palace stood
> Uncertain shapes, and unawares
> On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood
> And horrible nightmares——'

Then his father brusquely interrupted, and told him to be off to his tutor.

On the following day, to Brinson's deep amazement and disgust, Sir Geoffrey appeared at breakfast in a morning dress he much affected, of velvet tunic, light trousers, and thin shoes, instead of the shooting coat, gaiters, and boots proper to the large shooting party expected. It was too hot to shoot; he would join the party at luncheon in a certain wooded glen; he would ride leisurely over with the luncheon cart. So Sir Geoffrey said.

'Can you ride at all?' he asked Grace. Upon the meek reply that she thought she could manage to stick on, he hurried with her to the stables immediately after breakfast to choose a quiet pony to convey her to the luncheon party in the glen.

'Now would you be afraid to mount Punch, my dear?' he asked benevolently, when a solid, stolid grey barrel on four legs was led forth with evident reluctance on his part. She feared she was not quite up to Punch, she would rather try 'that black horse,' pointing to a sheeted quadruped, bridled and padded for exercise.

'My dear child, that is not a horse; it is a mare, called Diana, a very clever little hunter.'

'Let me try,' said the foolish child; and, before her grandfather

could reply, she had sprung upon the pad sideways, taken the bridle, motioned the groom away, and sent Diana cantering round the paddock, galloping a second round, and stopping abruptly in front of Sir Geoffrey, when she slipped easily to her feet by his side, saying that she thought Diana 'would do.'

'That was a nice exhibition, Miss Dorrien,' he growled, turning away with her, 'a fine entertainment for these grinning grooms and stablemen.'

'I couldn't help it,' she replied, nestling into his arm, 'it was so funny to be asked if I could ride when I was brought up in a cavalry regiment.'

'Brought up in a *what*?' he shouted. 'Pray have the goodness to remember that this is neither a circus nor a rough riding-school.'

'Even her beast of a father seems to have a soft spot in his Judas heart for her,' Sir Geoffrey mused, when riding by her side later. 'But her mother! Well, poor Carrie wanted a son —*and* heir. She might have bitten the dust for a son's sake.'

Mrs. Brinson meekly obeyed when commanded to follow her guests to the glen, ambling by a short way after the luncheon cart on a quiet cob, leaving Sir Geoffrey, Grace, and Pippin to canter over the high moors.

'Amy's habit seems to fit you very well,' Sir Geoffrey observed, pleased with the look of Diana and her rider. 'A woman never looks better than on a good horse, providing she sits well and dresses properly,' he thought.

'It's my own habit, I brought it on purpose; I knew you would give me a mount,' she said.

'Did you? Hum! Ha! Well, you shall keep your mount if you like. You and Diana seem made for one another; you ought not to be separated.—Brin, I've given Diana to Grace; what do you think of it, eh?' he said, when they met the shooters in the glen at the appointed hour.

His nephew expressed the warmest approbation, adding, for Grace's information, that Diana was a very promising filly, bred at Hardwin, of stainless pedigree, and at the present moment worth three hundred guineas.

When Mr. Hythe-Harbord observed rather tartly to his uncle at luncheon that a gallop over the moors was a singular way of cooling oneself and escaping the heat of a day too hot to shoot in, more than one of the shooters secretly agreed with Sir Geoffrey that the air of the moorlands might be most refreshing under the circumstances.

The day had turned calm and very sunny; no one was over-anxious to break up the luncheon-party. It was pleasant and cool in the romantic little glen, down which a musical beck tumbled, over which oak and ash trees arched, and from the opening of which a wide stretch of purple moor, alternating with green and gold of wooded and cultivated land, could be seen fading to azure horizons. Even Mrs. Brinson appeared to find solace and pleasure in the open air, the freedom, and unconventionality. Sir Geoffrey was pleasantly conscious of being an object of envy when his granddaughter lighted his cigar. When the shooters took up their guns and went, he lingered behind in great content. The guitar having travelled with the luncheon baskets, he was charmed by the singing of the old ballad—

'Oh! the oak and the ash and the bonny ivy-tree,
They flourish at hame in my ain countree,'

and 'The Fair Flower of Northumberland.' And when he asked how his granddaughter knew so many north-country songs, was bidden to remember that she was a north-country girl.

They remained perhaps a quarter of an hour after the others had left. They were just remounting, when Pippin was missed. One of the grooms reported that he had followed the shooting party. It was known that he had not enough wit to be trusted with a gun, though he was always hankering after one. Still, they rode away without him, since his father and his tutor were both shooting.

They wound quietly up the steep path that led out of the glen in single file: Mrs. Hythe-Harbord first, then Sir Geoffrey, then Grace. The servants' horses were at the head of the glen; the men walked on by a short cut to be ready to mount and follow. Mrs. Hythe-Harbord and Sir Geoffrey had emerged from the glen on the open ground, Grace was still concealed by the winding path through the coppice, when a shot was heard—no unexpected sound. But it was immediately followed by the agonised shriek of a horse, quickly succeeded by a human cry, more slowly by a dull thud and crashing of branches: after that came ominous silence. Grace, who ought by that time to have appeared at the head of the glen, was nowhere to be seen, nor was there any sound of hoofs along the winding path. Some seconds elapsed, the grooms looked at one another, Sir Geoffrey's face gloomed and paled to a deathly hue, Mrs. Hythe-Harbord helplessly murmured—

'What can be the matter?'

The horses, set quivering and sweating by that first piercing

shriek, now chafed at their bits and fidgeted. Then, on a sudden, Sir Geoffrey sprang to the ground, a young groom doing the same; and the old and young man, master and servant, jostled each other as they rushed down the glen, where the path was stained with fresh blood, some drops of which were sprinkled over brambles and ferny undergrowth. This was all crushed and broken by the fall of Diana and her rider, who both lay motionless, but apart, down by the rocky channel of the tumbling beck.

When Sir Geoffrey saw horse and rider lying thus by the glistening harts-tongue and spray-washed stones, he leapt, with a suppressed moan, like a boy, down the tangled glen-side, followed by the groom, who saw by poor Diana's glazed eyes, drooping head, and stretched legs that her race was run, and choked back a sob at the sight. Then he turned to the rider, while some of the shooting party, with beaters and servants, came running to the beck.

Sir Geoffrey's hat was off, his massive head was bent in agony over the white, blood-streaked face and closed eyes of his grandchild, whose helpless head he had raised, as he knelt, on his arm.

'Grace, Grace,' he cried frantically, 'speak to me, speak once. Don't die; oh, don't die!'

The groom caught the spraying water in his hands and dashed it in her face.

'Go away,' the old man shouted fiercely, pushing him off. 'She is dead, dead, dead!'

Some one brought brandy, and this, with a shaking hand, he tried to pour into her mouth, when she gave a deep sigh, and opened her eyes in great surprise.

'Oh, Grannie, what *are* you doing? Anybody hurt?'

'No, darling,' he sobbed; 'you were only killed. Drink this.'

The first object that met her sight and returning consciousness was the distraught countenance of the poor old man; the next, on the other side of the rocky stream, the pale, greenish face and glittering eyes of Brinson. He held a smoking gun in one of his hands, and Pippin, dazed and trembling, in the other.

'It was—Pippin,' he said brokenly; 'it was the poor—boy. He wanted to shoot—he turned the gun the wrong way.'

'No,' Pippin moaned, 'no, no. No more gun, no more gun.'

These few words and the sight of those two quivering faces never left her memory. Sir Geoffrey, reassured by the vigour with which the brandy was declined and pushed away, regained command of himself, and rose.

'Are you hurt? Can you get to your feet, my dear?' he asked with composure, holding a hand out to help her, as she rose slowly and stiffly, and stood, gathering up her tumbled hair and wiping the blood from her face, at sight of which Pippin shuddered and began his weird lament—

'Far, far in fairyland,
They sing to harp and horn;
In darkness here I stand,
Bewildered, wronged, forlorn.'

'Take Pippin away; tell him there's nothing wrong,' Grace whispered to his mother, who had now arrived at the brookside. As the latter led him, still shuddering and singing, away, Brinson came up with tender inquiries and offers of help, refusing to believe that no harm was done.

'Have you no pain in the side? Are you sure there is no broken rib?' he asked. His cousin looked at him with glittering eyes and an expression of face that he neither liked nor understood. Yet she smiled, though she made no reply. Then one of the sportsmen, who had travelled in Africa when African travel was newer and stranger than now, washed and bound the cut on her head, which was well hidden by hair.

Grace shed childish but bitter tears over the inanimate form of poor Diana; while Sir Geoffrey, hearing that it was the first horse she had ever had of her very own, offered her the pick of the stables.

'Ah, but you haven't another Diana to give. No, thank you, grandfather. Don't give me any living thing, anything that can be hurt. I bring them bad luck.'

'Eh, Miss, but it's true,' the young groom confided to her as he gave her the bridle of his own horse, to which the side-saddle had been transferred. 'There's not such another foaled. She was just like a child. I never knew a more Christian-like horse,' —observations that subsequently transferred five shillings from her possession to his.

'Did you hear Diana cry, grandfather? Wasn't it piteous?' she said, as they rode homewards. 'She reared when she was shot; and the next thing I knew, after her shriek and poor Pippin's cry, we were both rolling to the bottom. I suppose I came off at once.'

'Never mind, my dear; she could not have suffered much. Her back was broken by the fall. What a mercy you fell light! That's a nasty cut on your head. You'd better lie down till dinner.'

'Now, what do you think of that, Mursell?' Grace asked later on, when a warm bath, with Mursell's doctoring of bruises, had refreshed her, and the history of the day had been recounted to an attentive ear.

I think, Miss Grace, that ye are a wicked, suspicious, ill-minded yoong leddy, and well did ye deserve to be tumbled doon the glen,' was Mursell's vigorous and whole-hearted reply. 'For unbelievingness there was never one to beat ye as a lile lass, and ye're grown unbelievinger than a body can think.'

'Thank you, Mursell. I like a straightforward answer.

'Ay, and ye'll get it from Jean Mursell. Ye'd better go doon on your bended knees and pray for a better heart. Poor Mr. Brinson Hythe that your mamma and me have known from a lad —ay, and a bonnie laddie he was too. Poor Mr. Hythe, that stood your friend long before ye was born or thought of——'

'That he did, Mursie, for he saved me from the snare of being rich at peril to his own soul.'

'Poor, dear gentleman, to suspect him of murder! Ye'll be refusing to take your tea of a morning next. Who knows but Mursell has put in a pinch of poison, ye'll be saying? Fie, then!'

'Mursell, you have not just had your horse shot under you—your own poor, pretty Diana. You have not been rattled down a steep bank and taken up for dead, with a great cut in your head and bruises all over you. Poor Grannie, there were tears on his dear old face. And that demon with the smoking gun, and the poor frightened innocent. Oh, Mursell!'

'And him saying quite natural how it mishappened, Miss Greece. The poor innocent always hankering to shoot with the gentlemen.'

'And his kind papa showing him where to shoot, turning the gun for him. Mursell, no sportsman would have pointed the gun anywhere near the glen; nobody for the first time firing a heavy rifle would suddenly turn it in an *opposite* direction. Pippin is only fourteen; it was as much as he could do to hold the thing to his shoulder. Whoever fired that shot watched and waited and heard the others go up the glen, leaving me behind. Besides, no gun could have been fired from that spot by any sane sportsman. One way was the glen, another the horses at the top, another the lunch cart and servants below, another the shooters and beaters in front. If Brinson had said Pippin got at the gun and fired without leave, the story might have held water. But no—it was the boy, he said; the boy turned the gun

the wrong way. Perhaps it was meant only for the mare. He was jealous and angry at my having the poor thing given me. He told me she was worth three hundred guineas. Still, to kill the poor thing!'

'Then come away, Missie; do as your mamma bids me. "Come away," she says, "but not without Miss Grace." Ye're here in disobedience, and what can ye expect but misfortune? There's no luck for them that disobey parents.'

'Oh, Mursell! how deceived you are! Father *wishes* me to be here. Poor mother is under the dominion of Judas Brimstone. It is he, and he only, who has done all the mischief. Who but Brinson Hythe keeps spies in the village to tell him who is near Hardwin? Who told the servants not to admit us? Who came himself to stop us? Who conveyed us safe off the place, and told us dogs were let loose at night? Who sent insulting messages with my returned card, saying Sir Geoffrey declined to admit me? Sir Geoffrey had not even heard I was there. When I stole a march upon him, he was delighted. It makes him ten years younger.'

'Indeed, Missie, Sir Geoffrey is too much the gentleman to be rude to the face of a leddy. He would say a say, dearie. Mr. Hythe-Harbord does not deny what he did, and why he did it, for the good of all——'

'Let him leave *my* good alone, and look out to his own, and tell lies for that——'

'Fie, Miss Greece! Mr. Hythe-Harbord knows Sir Geoffrey well, and he says this 'll not last.'

'If he can help it, Mursell.'

'He knows how he 'll take sudden likes, particular to the yoong and—and well favoured—and then 'tis a little thing 'll turn him against them. He knows—Mr. Hythe knows well, any minute ye may do something, or only look—that he 'll take ill. And Sir Geoffrey *never forgives*. Do ye mind that, Missie dear. It's the family pride. Harbords never forgive. That was the first thing I heard in the servants' hall here, Missie. Sir Giles never forgave his poor son, Mr. Reginald. It's a terrible thing; but did ye never look at Sir Geoffrey and note the strong, masterful face of him?'

'Yes; and I've looked in the glass and seen one very much like it, only not so kind. Fetch me the book I left this morning and a cup of tea, and leave me till it's time to dress. In the meantime, Mursell, you can consider your sins and follies.'

The book was brought, but not read. 'Childe Roland is come

to the Dark Tower,' she was thinking, 'and will probably not leave it alive. The enemy is strong and subtle—a first-class liar. I 'm no match for him. But I won't give in. Poor mother, poor, poor mother!'

The good Brinson's manner to his evil-minded and taciturn cousin at dinner was more than brotherly, it was almost caressing; the accident was freely alluded to till Pippin came in, still scared and wan. Sir Geoffrey's glance followed his grandchild all the evening; the terror of the afternoon had done more than weeks of intercourse to strengthen his affection; it made him realise how closely his daughter's child had wound herself about his lonely heart.

It was one of Sir Geoffrey's growing peculiarities to cherish his family privacy, and seldom admit guests to his table except at set parties. Partly from this, and partly from Mrs. Hythe-Harbord's native and increasing inability to play the hostess, people rarely stayed at Hardwin. House-parties were unknown. The distinguished artists, who passed long periods planning, painting, and carving at Hardwin, were assigned handsome suites of rooms and special servants to attend them. They were asked to call for things as if at an hotel, dining in solitude or together as they pleased, and invited, together or separately, from time to time to dine with the family. Three of them were present on the night following the accident in the glen.

They were not always minded to accept these invitations, which would sometimes find one of them absent, no one knew where, to return no one knew when. One of them would only come if excused evening dress. He was the painter of Persephone; he appeared this evening in a brown velveteen coat that had seen better days. Sometimes he was mute and dreamy the evening long; sometimes fire descended upon him, and he spoke; then everybody else was mute. This evening he was silent, his hair bristled in a tumbled shock on the top of his head, from frequent pushing upward with both hands.

The conversation rested chiefly between Mr. Hythe-Harbord and the painter of the wall frescoes in the central hall. Grace listened spellbound, surprised, almost awed, by the intellectual brilliance and general information displayed by her amiable cousin; and fascinated by the superb silence of Persephone's painter. She was contrasting the average tone of Hardwin conversation with what she was accustomed to hear at her father's table and those of his friends. She had never before met intellectual people, or talked with cultured people. This

stolen visit was opening a new world to her. 'A year at Hardwin,' she said, 'would be an education.'

'To some people,' her grandfather assented; 'you can't draw out what does not exist. The prince of fools is a learned fool. And the most weariful woman is a learned woman.'

'A learned man is never weariful, Grannie. Not that I ever knew one.'

CHAPTER VIII

YOUTH hates nothing but stagnation; movement of body and mind is necessary to vitality; a thrill, however painful, is never unwelcome at twenty. Grace Dorrien extracted a savage charm from the unusual circumstance of dining with a man who, she was firmly persuaded, had tried to murder her a few hours before. She could not help studying his face and trying to realise the emotions it masked. Was he glad to be spared the burden of blood-guilt, or disappointed at being balked of his purpose? The consciousness of his enmity to her, as well as his supposed guilt, invested him with a sort of lurid fascination. The bare fact of inspiring hatred is startling, especially to the young, still more especially was it a surprise to Grace, who, so early in life, had become accustomed to inspire entirely opposite feelings, especially in the other sex. Vanity was not wholly absent from the breast of this damsel; what, she thought, if she were to enslave and subjugate her amiable cousin? It was the last infirmity of vain and weak girlhood.

But, if to break bread with a virtual and prospective murderer be exciting, to pray with one must be a weird and uncanny experience.

The next day was Sunday, when, in any possible weather, Sir Geoffrey walked, and Mrs. Hythe-Harbord drove, at least once to the nearest village church, the beautiful private chapel at Hardwin being used on week-days and wet Sundays. On this occasion all but Mrs. Hythe-Harbord, Reginald and his governess, walked to church, where, to Grace's extreme surprise, there was a fine organ, beautifully played, and an excellent choir with well-trained voices—thanks to Hardwin. To hear Brinson's voice uplifted in holy hymns and psalms, and to see him, white-surpliced and reverent, reading the Lessons from the brass eagle, was strange and not pleasant. No doubt the shot was only meant for Diana. Yet she was more indignant at the idea of killing the unoffending,

dumb creature than at the suspicion of murder. After all, being killed is not so bad a fate.

Little Reginald begged to be allowed to walk home from church. His father, consenting, went to the carriage, which was already filled, and lifted him down. The boy was frail and delicate, small for his years, and weirdly precocious. Brinson touched him with a gentleness, and glanced at the vivacious, large-eyed face with a tenderness, that went to Grace's heart and made her eyes hot with tears. But no sooner was the little wretch set carefully on his feet, than, without a word or look for his father, he dashed up to Grace, seized her hand in his small, hot fist, and clung to her all the way back, attracted by her youth and freshness and high spirits, as young children always are.

'Always the youngest and the newest,' Brinson said bitterly.

'Human nature, Brin,' Sir Geoffrey replied; 'it's the same at all ages.' To which Brinson retorted savagely that there was no doubt about *that*.

Then Pippin turned jealous of Reginald. So when they reached the lake, Grace promised to take him in the boat after luncheon to make up. He should scull and she would steer, or he should steer and she would scull. Pippin was delighted; he was strong, well-developed, and beautiful in body, a marked contrast to Reginald, whose cleverness and frail physique seemed in proportion to his brother's bewildered brain and goodly form.

Pippin sculled well; he passed a happy afternoon, his singular mental gifts appearing, under the stimulus of happiness, to the exclusion of his sorrowful deficiencies. With this new girl-comrade he laid aside all shyness and restraint, charmed by her comeliness and soothed by her friendliness and consideration.

'There be none of Beauty's daughters
With a magic like thee;
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me,'

he began, marking the rhythm with oar-strokes, as he faced her in the stern with the ropes. When he finished she was at a loss for a reply, ordinary conversation being impossible, so she repeated 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' which brought such beatitude into his sweet face as made her heart ache. Ballad was exchanged with ballad until Grace's collection was exhausted, then Pippin rested on his oars and they drifted, followed by swans, he, crooning his own little rhymes; she, listening and looking into the large, wistful eyes for another hour, the rhymes becoming more and

more suggestive and poetic. Could this guileless, beautiful lad be a fool? Was he not rather a poet, accessible only to beautiful and ennobling ideas and images, and lost to all else?

'No, my dear,' Sir Geoffrey said later, 'Pippin is neither a fool nor a poet. The hemispheres of his brain are unbalanced; one is an infant's, the other that of a genius.'

They were climbing the central tower together during this discussion, Grace haunted and oppressed by the imprisoned soul always trying to struggle from Pippin's darkened brain and troubled blue eyes. His fairy lament never failed to wring hearts; but his short speech, 'Pippin is very happy this afternoon,' as he waved good-bye with a smile of singular sweetness, seemed to her infinitely sadder.

'Why is Pippin so much afraid of his father?' she asked.

'Because he *is* his father; boys ought to be afraid of their fathers,' Sir Geoffrey returned gruffly; 'and girls too.'

'I 'm not afraid of mine, and never was.'

'You are not a model of your sex, and that is probably why.'

'I don't want to be a model of my sex, or of any other. I hate models, they are so slow.'

'Naturally. Solomon was wise.'

'He was wise such a long time ago, and he had seven hundred wives.'

'Ay, he knew vanity—had drunk it to the dregs. I was twenty a long time ago. My mind is still young, but my legs are growing old and would like to sit down.'

They had reached the fifth story, and rested there by a window that looked across two quadrangles and almost the whole of Hardwin Hall—a splendid, well-ordered mass of roofs, towers, spires, quadrangles and gateways, gilded vanes catching the last sunbeams, high windows flashing them back, wood and purple hills spread beyond; far, far away on the western horizon lay a sheet of polished gold that was sun-lit sea. To the east was a dimness that at first seemed thicker haze, but later revealed tall shafts blackly emerging from the darkness; there lay Harbordtown, the child of Sir Geoffrey's new mines, a great centre of the iron trade.

'What a loot!' his granddaughter said, beholding these great possessions with amazement.

'What 's a loot?' growled her grandfather.

'It isn't slang. It 's Indian, a Hindoo word.'

'I 'm not a Hindoo, Miss Dorrien. English is quite good enough for me.'

'Well, Grannie; it's a goodly heritage then. Why Hardwin alone is immense. Besides those wooded hills and cornfields and Harbordtown and the mines. A very goodly heritage. And then to think that it is all mine,' she added, as if oppressed by the splendour of the thought.

'Oh! really? And I always thought it was mine,' he returned acidly; 'I may be mistaken, of course.'

'So it is at present, but it will be mine eventually—in the course of nature and justice—and according to the laws of inheritance, Grannie.'

Sir Geoffrey was dumb with amazement; his eyes widened as he looked at the tranquil young face so softly outlined in its fresh bloom against the blue distance.

'This is more than audacity, Grace,' he said angrily at last; 'it is impertinence.'

'Nay, grandfather, that is not the word,' she replied, quite unruffled. 'I merely stated an obvious fact. No disrespect was intended. You ought not to blaze up at nothing.'

'Perhaps, madam, you will have the goodness to explain yourself. I am not as young as I was, my wits are scarcely as nimble as they were. Am I to understand that you wish to possess the buildings and lands before your eyes?'

'Not I. I wouldn't give a thank-you for the whole of it and all your other estates and moneys put together. I never wanted to be rich. I've seen rich people very wretched, Grannie, dear. But it ought to be mine all the same; mine and Laura's after mother. Suppose you died intestate——'

'—Suppose I died a bigger fool than I was born!'

'—It would come to us—it is our mother's natural and rightfu heritage, and ours after her. You will leave the whole to Brinson and his heirs, Pippin and Reginald; it will be a monstrous piece of injustice and unkindness.'

'We live and learn—things are turned upside down; now-a-days we learn from the ripe wisdom and mellow experience of our grandchildren.'

'Not you, Grannie; you are far too wilful. After all, it would be absurd to leave all that dirt to mother, unless you forgave her. That I would ask you to do on my bended knees. That, and nothing else,' she added, becoming serious.

He looked at her with a searching wistfulness that went to her heart.

'Would you?' he asked doubtfully, his eyes clouding with tears; and Grace went down before him, and pressed her hands together like a child at prayer.

'Forgive her, grandfather,' she said. He went on looking at her with the same wistful, heartbreaking gaze, and she repeated the petition twice.

'You don't know what you ask,' he said presently, quite gently. 'You don't know what passed before you were born, and it isn't fit that you should know. Get up, my dear.'

She rose, turned and looked straight into the chalky face of Brinson Hythe, who was rising slowly, like Banquo's ghost, from the tower stair, and at sight of whom Sir Geoffrey quailed.

'You are looking pale, Cousin Brinson,' she said, with a glance of contemptuous defiance. 'You ought not to climb so quickly; your heart is not equal to it.'

'My heart is equal to more than you think,' he replied, with a green glitter in his eyes.

'So is mine,' she retorted in her boyish, dare-devil way. 'Not that it suffers either from ossification or degeneration.'

'My dear Grace, what *are* you talking about? I cannot understand.'

'The subject is too hard for you, Grannie; it is my cousin's heart.'

'Diamonds are hard,' Sir Geoffrey replied, 'and valuable, like Brin's heart; good old Brin!'

'Judas-Jacob-Brimstone grinned like a tiger at the compliment, Mursell,' she observed, when relating the circumstance that night; whereupon Mursell scolded her severely.

'Ye should not say things behind a body's back ye would not say to his face,' she added.

'I said nothing about him I wouldn't say to Cousin Judas-Jacob's face, Mursie; but I don't wear my heart on my sleeve for that vulture to peck at.'

Though scarcely a model of discretion, Grace had more of the serpent than is usual at the end of the teens; therefore, on that Sunday evening she proposed leaving on the following day, to her grandfather's distress and surprise. She must at least stay for the dance on Tuesday, he stipulated; as for her having no ball dress, they would go to town to-morrow, choose one, and have it made in time, if the sewing-wenches sat up all night in relays to finish it.

'My dear Grace, you would not be so cruel as to leave before the dance,' her amiable cousin exclaimed, and the poor echo wife repeated. Objections were raised only to be overruled, until a promise to stay over the dance and a day over that at least, was

extracted from the reluctant guest before she retired to her porphyry chamber, to execute a war-dance of triumph there to the scandal of Mursell.

Next morning Sir Geoffrey and Grace rode the ten miles to the country town, accompanied by Pippin, and the three chose the white silk gown to be covered with costly lace flounces that emerged from some receptacle at Hardwin, and all the necessary etceteras.

'She walks in beauty like the night,' Pippin began to sing, in his rapture over the dress.

This arduous duty accomplished, the three went over the Cathedral, and lunched at the Angel very happily. Pippin made 'A Song of Three,' displaying such intelligence and absence of fear, as made his cousin's heart ache at the thought that his poor bewildered brain might come right in different surroundings. Then, finding a circus outside the town, Sir Geoffrey was commanded to take them to the afternoon performance, to his own great surprise and amusement, and they rode home, tired and happy, in the autumn twilight, just in time to dress for dinner, at which Pippin repeated some of the clown's jokes with ecstatic laughter.

But, although the sewing-wenches duly sat up and finished the ball dress in time for the servant who waited for it to convey it and the dressmaker to Hardwin by dusk on Tuesday, the dress ran a very good chance of not being worn.

'It is borne in upon me that I shall not dance in the great ball-room to-night,' Grace confided to the faithful Mursell in the morning, 'I dreamt of Judas-Jacob too much—he pushed me over the battlements, he blew up my bed with gunpowder, he poisoned my drink——'

'Eh, dear, Miss Greece,' Mursell retorted impatiently, 'if ye think ill thoughts, ye'll aye have ill dreams, and serve ye right too. And the next mischief ye dance into, it'll be poor Mr. Hythe-Harbord's fault. I am ashamed for ye, Miss Greece, to begin that like; and you in your twenties this very morn.'

Great joy it was to Sir Geoffrey to discover the important fact of the birthday, and make it an excuse for a costly gift.

His nephew knew that he was always buying jewellery, much more than he ever gave Mrs. Brinson, though that poor lady had received more than she could possibly use, including many precious heirlooms reset; but what became of all this was more than the omniscient Brinson could tell or divine. Once it struck him as noteworthy that it was always bought at a certain time of

year; he could find no reason for this; the only anniversary known to him in that month was Mrs. Dorrien's birthday.

He had not divined the blank of that returning birthday to the deserted father. Twenty costly birthday gifts—the first anniversary was blank—lay dark in a secret cabinet, awaiting the return of the prodigal child. The first of these emerged from its long seclusion on that Tuesday morning, and surprised Caroline's child, during whose whole life it had been waiting in the dark, when she came down to breakfast and the pile of packets surrounding her plate. Pippin's gift was his own much prized, much worn, copy of Tennyson, and his pet fishing-rod; Reginald's a box of chocolate and a white kitten; their mother offered some old point-lace, and Cousin Jacob-Judas-Brimstone a gold damascened dagger as a paper-knife. All these treasures, graciously received and unpacked with sparkling eyes, afforded keenest pleasure to Sir Geoffrey, who ate his breakfast with great relish, growling out various comments on the folly of birthday keeping and caustic sayings on the absurdity of birthday gifts, with recommendations to Grace to eat her breakfast and leave the gimcracks alone.

'Breakfast indeed! Why, Grannie, you've given me the biggest gimcrack of all. "To Grace with her grandfather's best wishes." Oh, Grannie, what *can* it be?'

'Rubbish, Grace, rubbish; eat your breakfast and don't play the fool,' he grumbled, delighted at the excitement with which the paper wrappings were torn off, until a morocco casket was discovered with a key tied on. Pippin looked on with a radiant face and kept up a little quiet croon of rhymed comment.

'Oh! Grannie, you wouldn't be so wicked as to *sell* me?' she gasped with flushed cheeks, as she fitted the key.

'There's no market for rubbish,' he growled.

She raised the lid, the two boys looking over her shoulder. 'Pooh!' cried Reginald, 'nothing but shining stones. Silly girl's nonsense!'

'Oh! Grannie, how *very* kind!' she exclaimed, rising and leaving the jewels on their purple velvet bed. She clasped the massive grey head in her arms and kissed the strong old face repeatedly, in spite of growls and snarls. Then she raised the first tray and discovered other bright treasures beneath, the whole being a *parure* of opals and diamonds; then, looking up, she met the gaze of Cousin Brinson, whose face was like that of one who needs a blue pill, and cold shivers ran down her.

The cousins went together to the lake with Pippin's fishing-rod, rowed out some distance and fished; Pippin earnest and happy

and full of rhymes. Fishing was a sport little favoured by Miss Dorrien, whose mercurial temperament and lack of patience demanded more excitement and activity than is furnished by a rod with a hook at one end and a fool at the other. But Pippin's sweet looks and pathetic delight, together with his impromptu rhymes and melodies captivated her.

'Fish! fish! out of the sea,
Leap, leap, little fish!
Some one is waiting and watching for thee,
Some one is watching and waiting to see
If fishie will come to his dish,'

he hummed happily. But the fish stopped his ears at the voice of the charmer, nettled, perhaps, by being addressed as a denizen of the sea, so Pippin amended coaxingly—

'Fish, fish, deep in the lake,
Sweet, sweet little fish!
Some one is longing and sad for your sake,
Some one has flies for you, little fish take,
Take of my bounty, sweet fish.'

Then fiercely—

'Fish, fish, scornful and bold,
Bad, bad little fish!
Down to your house in the water-weed cold,
Down, down, we will dive to your hold,
Catch you and—Oh! Oh!——'

The boat was filling with water. Grace, diverted by Pippin's novel way of angling, had not observed it until the water covered her ankles; then it was not so much that the water invaded the boat, as that the boat invaded the water, and, almost before they had time to cry for help, they were in the lake, oars, rod and cushions floating by them. She could swim well and struck out before there was time to sink, but Pippin's curly head went under; so, treading water and sending forth shriek after shriek, she waited till he rose, then caught at his hair and drew him near, with the inevitable result that he threw out arms and legs and clung fiercely to her. Then it was that crinoline proved good at need, floating to the surface and helping to buoy them, until the boat, which had turned over, rose bottom upward and served to hold on by. In the meantime, the piercing cries attracted the attention of some people driving up to the house, and the coachman, turning off the road, whipped his horses over the turf to the lake-side at a canter. The reins were then taken from the horses, attached to a float, and flung to the struggling pair, who were easily towed to land.

Thus it came to pass that Sir Geoffrey, strolling forth to join the two anglers, was greatly surprised to meet two miserable objects, covered with water-weed and mud, and leaving wet trails on the gravel road behind them. Both were hatless, Pippin's bronzed aureole hung limp and muddy over his wet face.

'The fish wouldn't come to Pippin, so Pippin went to the fish, and I had to fish for Pippin, and somebody's coachman fished us both out with his reins. But we can't stop, we must go in and have hot baths,' was the explanation he received.

'Ay, ay!' cried Mursell sarcastically, when her young lady had been given hot drink and a hot bath, rolled in hot blankets and ordered to go to sleep, 'Ye'll be saying it was poor Mr. Brinson cut the hole in the boat to drown his own lad next.'

'I shall say nothing and think what I like, Mursie. But I wish you could have seen Judas-Jacob's face when we met him in the hall; Macbeth's at Banquo's ghost was a fool to it.'

'Macbeth! Ay, it's they stage plays that put the bad thoughts in your head. How would you have the poor gentleman look to see his own lile lad half-drowned then?'

'I was not aware, Grace, that swimming was one of your accomplishments,' Mr. Hythe-Harbord said later on.

'So I imagined. And of course you know that Pippin cannot swim.'

'My dear cousin, what inference is implied?' he asked smilingly, as he stood in one of his graceful attitudes in the ball-room, carefully fitting some gloves on his slim hands.

'The obvious one, that if she had not held poor Pippin up by the hair of his head, at the risk of her life, Brin, there would have been one less in the family to-night,' Sir Geoffrey returned; 'and if the reins had been thrown a little later there would have been two less. She was nearly exhausted. Pippin weighs rather more than a feather and a half.'

'I am *very* glad to be alive to-night, grandfather,' she said. 'Your ball-room is more beautiful than—a dream.'

She had never seen anything like it. The arched roof was borne on arched pillars of white marble, grey-veined. The round arches were fretted, the capitals carved ornately, three slender pillars bound in each cluster with light and graceful effect. A second pillared arcade rising to the roof ran round three sides of the hall, making a kind of cloister on the floor level and a balcony above. This balcony was joined from pillar to pillar by a painted frieze, on which corybantes, dancing satyrs, fauns and nymphs flew and chased each other in their dancing. Elves, fairies and hobgoblins,

aerial creatures, birds and frisking animals, lambs, deer and other graceful living things, danced along the frieze, the floral and foliate carvings of the capitals seemed to dance, the spaces were filled by alternate dancing figures and whirling foliage. No ornament or design, nothing suggested stillness. A statue of a dancing man—a replica of that joyous antique dancer among the Elgin marbles—stood below the minstrel gallery at the top of the room; it was flanked by one of Esmeralda with her goat. The wall space above the minstrel gallery, the centre to which all eyes were attracted, was divided into three arched spaces, one large and two small, by marble pillars, the whole enclosed in a third arch, like a three-lighted window.

In the first space was painted in fresco a whirl of winged angels, beneath this a predella, also in fresco, showed the sinful lovers of Dante's Inferno whirling in pairs in the endless tempest. In the right-hand space was David dancing before the ark, with a predella of damsels playing with timbrels; in the left-hand space was the daughter of Herodias dancing before Herod, with a predella showing John Baptist beheaded in prison. In the ceiling spaces, groups of whirling Bacchantes and Mœnads were painted; similar turning and moving figures were carved on the arch ribs and cornice; here were dancing and piping children, here nautch girls, there, Mignon daintily treading her egg dance: kittens playing with autumn leaves, swallows sweeping in aerial circles, fluttering butterflies and frisking moths, filled small spaces.

The hall was lighted in the old magnificent way, by immense cut crystal chandeliers and branches, sparkling with innumerable wax-lights; the floor was of polished parquet of beautiful natural woods, in an exquisite pattern, perceptible only on close inspection, the whole effect being a shining brown. The arcades running round the hall were thickly carpeted, furnished with lounges and long mirrors. Windows in the arcade on one side opened into a terraced garden, lamp-lighted with exquisite effect. Some spaces were curtained from the ball-room, some on each side partially screened from it by orange-trees and palms in tubs; here and there fountains tossed refreshing spray.

The entrance opposite the minstrel gallery was through this arcade, part of which, curtained off, made an ante-chamber in which people were received. Pippin made a charming figure in Highland dress, of silken royal tartans, and jewelled brooch and dirk-handle. Soft music of melodies and operatic selections came from a band of strings and wood-wind in the gallery.

But when Grace first admired the ball-room it was empty,

musicians were dropping in to the gallery one by one, and tuning their instruments. Sir Geoffrey was taking her round the great empty, echoing splendour. They paused by one of the long mirrors. The white silk with its beautiful old lace and the rose-wreath in Grace's dark hair set off her vivid colouring, heightened by pleasure and excitement, and threw up the changing inner glow of the opals and fiery diamonds on her neck and arms. Sir Geoffrey was happy as a child with a toy to have this young creature of his own blood, sparkling with affection and pleasure, on his arm. Her fresh comeliness and grace ministered to his pride and love of beauty, as well as to nobler and more natural feelings, while that somewhat over-sumptuous taste and love of display, which grew on him with advancing years, was fostered by the same. She was just at the age when the lust of the eye, the pride of life, and the pomps and vanities of the unknown wicked world, have most power to charm. Seeing her reflected full-length figure on the arm of this fine old man, she flushed with sudden consciousness of beauty.

'How much alike we are, Grannie! Mother always said so. Likenesses sometimes skip a generation.'

'Truly a lovely pair! December and May, my dear. Crabbed age and blooming youth,' he growled, his contentment dashed by the bitter thought that this was not the mother's darling. 'Your sister is fair?'

'Delicately fair and *so* pretty, and she looks so good! The kind of girl who falls in love with the curate and dies of it. How she would enjoy this! Will you be angry if I give her half these opals?'

'Savagely angry.'

Why is it so often the fashion to appear inept and idiotic? It was not the custom in those days to dance well; good-breeding required people to lounge languidly through quadrilles and lancers, looking like condemned criminals, regardless of music. Even the waltz was galloped through without grace. In revenge, the graceless, stepless galop-waltz degenerated into a mad unseemly romp.

Grace always found it hard to dance in ball-rooms with youth in her pulse, and the madness of dance-music in her ears. It was a curious spectacle, fashionable ill-dressed people lounging about in a sort of loose formation, apparently deaf to the bright provocative dance-music, in this sumptuous hall, where every kind of poetic movement and rhythmic dance was painted and carved, and so much exquisite costume, and even more exquisite absence of it, represented. A

hundred and fifty people looked few and small scattered on the shining parquet in the spacious building. But the round dances presented the oddest sight. Singular pairs, consisting of female faces, bare shoulders and arms, emerging from huge bell-tents of drapery and clinging wildly to straight black figures, whose impact sent the draped bell-tents swaying and bulging with utmost uncouthness to one side, rotating round each other; here and there torn skirts, sometimes an upset. The old story, every prospect pleased, only man was vile to look at. In spite of jewels and colours and beautiful faces, arms and throats, the ball-room looked far better and more suggestive of dancing empty than full, except during the impressive and then little known *polonaise* dear to Sir Geoffrey, with which the ball opened.

'And oh! my dear,' sighed Mrs. Hythe-Harbord, beneath the celebrated Harbord rubies, 'how I *wish* it was over. I am not fit for late hours. But don't tell Brinson,' she added hastily, 'he dislikes illness and is always vexed because I can entertain so little.'

It was Grace's final impression of Hardwin. Next morning, in her first sleep, came a telegram—there was a private telegraphic station at Hardwin—from her mother. 'Your sister is very ill and wants you. Come at once.'

She went at once. Sir Geoffrey drove with her to the station, and at parting pressed a pocket-book into her hand with a smiling, '*Au revoir*. Not good-bye.'

CHAPTER IX

THE departing guest left aching hearts behind: Mrs. Hythe-Harbord and Reginald cried: Pippin raised his usual lament—

> 'Far, far in fairyland
> The hearts I love are torn;
> By dream-built arches spanned,
> The river runs forlorn.'

Sir Geoffrey felt like a new boy at school, when he drove back to Hardwin without the young creature who had invaded his castle, stormed his heart and given him more pleasure and happiness in a week than he had known in twenty years. But she would come again soon—perhaps not alone. Dorrien? No, he could not stand Dorrien, even for the girl's sake.

One day when Brinson had alluded at table to that cherished foe, Sir Geoffrey had been betrayed into his usual expression,

'That beast Dorrien,' when Grace, very pale, had said, 'Sir Geoffrey, you have forgotten who is present,' and he had replied—

'I had indeed forgotten it. I beg Miss Dorrien's pardon—and Colonel Dorrien's.'

Castle-building, the pastime of youth, had long been neglected by Geoffrey Harbord; yet he began again in his old age and was more soothed and charmed by that aerial architecture, than by the actual planning and erection of his solid, earth-built palaces. His granddaughter should pass at least half the year with him; she should ride, dance, sing, study, and be covered with jewels.

Grace, in the meantime, was almost as unhappy as it is possible to be at twenty, which is saying a great deal. The telegram provided her, as if expressly worded to that end, with endless possibilities of illness and death to brood upon during the interminable journey from one end of England to the other. Laura dying without her sister; the last words and looks she wanted from Laura dying with her; Laura unhappy, thinking herself neglected, no possibility of ever putting things straight. Life without Laura! Impossible. It would kill her mother. And to think that while this tragedy had been approaching with steady and irresistible steps, she was dancing and delighting herself in vanities.

Newcourt Place at last. Weeping bitterly and wild with fear, she rushed into the hall and was met by her mother, who was just issuing from the house for a stroll in the grounds.

'Really, Grace,' Mrs. Dorrien cried. 'Your deportment is wilder than ever. What is the meaning of all this?'

'How is she? Where is she?' she sobbed. 'Mother, how can you bear to go out with Laura dying?'

'What exaggeration! Laura has not even been in danger. She is asleep at present.'

'Then your message was a wanton piece of cruelty, mother. How *could* you?' she flashed out with her usual recklessness. 'Oh! it was cruel!'

Lady Wotton, who had joined them, looked grave; she said something about filial respect and self-control. Grace had been travelling all night and was doubtless over-tired and upset; food and sleep would refresh her. Her aunt was very glad she had come so promptly, she might just peep at her sister in her sleep and go to her on her waking. It would be the best medicine for Laura to see her. Laura had had a severe cold, and seemed to have no strength to bear it, her lungs were delicate, there was a consumptive tendency, much care and a winter abroad had been prescribed.

This unfortunate meeting led to a disinclination on the part of Mrs. Dorrien either to listen to or believe anything Grace said of Hardwin, and to Mursell's story being heard first. Cousin Judas-Jacob Brimstone had no existence, her mother maintained, except in Grace's distempered imagination; Brinson's advice was both excellent and disinterested.

'His excellent and disinterested advice has kept you and grandfather twenty-one years apart, mother.'

'You speak with equal ignorance and presumption, Grace. My disobedient and clandestine marriage alone has done that.'

'Oh, mother, how blinded you are by that Judas! He is as false as hell. He has given you the worst advice.'

'Your language is on a par with your wrong-headedness,' was the chilling reply. 'You know my cousin far better than I do, of course. I have only known him for forty years; you for a week.'

'Mother dear, why did he pretend that my grandfather would not see me?'

'He explained fully to Mursell.'

'And my reception gave his explanation the lie. Mother, let us go to Hardwin, you and I together. I am sure he will be glad to make it up. He is so kind and warm-hearted. Naturally, he wants you to make the first advance. He was actually crying when he thought me killed. And there were tears in his eyes when he said good-bye.'

'Perhaps you had better go and live with your grandfather altogether, Grace, since he is so much attached to you. I have heard that affection sometimes skips a generation,' she added with the bitterness of jealousy and long-wounded affection; 'you certainly display the most exquisite taste in your attempt to bring your mother to repentance and apologise to her father for her. I do repent and yet I am chastised. I was an undutiful and disobedient daughter. Heaven has repaid me in kind. I have an undutiful and disobedient daughter.'

'Then I am sorry for you, mother. But her name is not Grace, and you know it. Mother, why do you hate me? Why are you so unjust to me? Unkind you always were. It is a shame.'

'Leave me,' was the haughty rejoinder. So Grace, angry, wounded, and mistaken, rushed out of the room, unconscious of the jealousy mingling with her mother's bitter indignation. Even the jewels given the daughter stabbed the mother. She recognised them as some of her mother's, last seen in an old-fashioned setting. They were to be reset for her, the fashion of the new

setting had been discussed; they had been reset in that fashion, and now were given, not to her, but to her rebellious child, who had stolen, without her permission, into her father's house and heart.

'What message may I take to my mother?' had been one of Grace's last words to her grandfather. 'What message did you bring from her?' was his reply. 'Mother is a woman; she has had many troubles,' she returned. 'Say something to her.'

'Tell your mother, then,' he said at last, 'that I hope she will allow you to come to Hardwin again soon.'

All this Grace repeated, and Mrs. Dorrien construed into the implacability she had so long been taught to attribute to her father. She even detected a malicious pleasure in Sir Geoffrey's putting her daughter before her.

Grace regretted for the rest of her life that she had supplied Brinson with a ready-made lie, as to his reason for denying her admission to Hardwin. He had caught at it readily and as quickly turned it against her. When did a lie benefit mortal? Had she had a right courage in that moment, the whole fabric of twenty-one years' weaving might have been swept away in a moment. But innocence took fright at the guile it should have conquered. When frank natures take refuge in shifts and evasions, they pay the penalty of their virtues; they are believed. Sir Geoffrey believed in the reason given for Brinson's refusing Grace admission to Hardwin, though that refusal was a severe and never forgotten strain on his trust.

'You invented a lie of the most damnable description and attributed it to me,' he said more than once. 'A lie is a bad thing, Brin. But a lie that is lied about is the devil's own delight.'

'Those words are such as filial respect alone can overlook,' Brinson replied haughtily; 'a conventional falsehood is no lie. "Not at home" is a social counter.'

'A conventional fiddle-stick! A social rot! Tell your own conventional falsehoods, but don't tell any for me or of me. You speak of overlooking, nephew Brinson. Let me tell you that it takes a quarter of a century's loyalty, friendship, service, and helpfulness on your part, not to mention kinship and affection on mine, to help me to overlook, not only those lies, but gross rudeness and incivility to my granddaughter.'

'I see that I made a mistake, an error of judgment that I deeply regret,' Brinson replied gently. 'But, my dear uncle, you have forgotten—in the charm of Grace's personality, which has

naturally won your heart—that you would not have received her had her card been taken in to you.'

'Forgotten? *You* forget that I am not an utter brute, unfit for civilised society.'

'How often have I pleaded, and vainly pleaded, for a reconciliation with Caroline and her children? How often have I suggested asking them to come here?'

'How often have you made a meddlesome ass of yourself?'

'Too often, I fear,' was the velvet rejoinder. 'One should never essay the difficult and delicate office of peace-maker. It is the signal for the belligerents to turn and rend the intervener.'

'By the way,' added Sir Geoffrey—for this conversation, one of a series with variations, took place immediately after the boating accident,—'have you been able to throw any light upon the cutting of that plank in the boat?'

'The only possible solution seems to be that some mischievous boy—perhaps poor Pippin himself, he might have done it and forgotten it—trying a saw, and then frightened at his own mischief, may have stuck the cut-out piece in without reflecting, or perhaps knowing, that the glue would dissolve and so sink the boat. The hole was very roughly and jaggedly cut. Unwin ought to have seen it. I think you should discharge him. Such negligence is culpable. You might employ him elsewhere; the man is honest and steady, and a handy fellow.'

'I leave it to you. Poor Pippin owes his life to his cousin. It's a gallant lass, Brin.'

'Oh! very much so. There's a reckless daring about poor Jack Dorrien that one can't help admiring.'

'Why, Jack?' growled Sir Geoffrey. 'There were some handsome, and well-dressed, and well-bred women in the ball-room on Tuesday, Brinson, but not one more graceful, pretty, or well-bred than Grace. Not one with half her sense and spirit. Not fully developed, a little thin in the arms and bust, but the slimness and promise of youth. Only just twenty. At thirty she will be superb. Nothing unfeminine about her, nothing bold or mannish; quite the contrary.'

'Well! circus-riding, after all, is a feminine art. There is no reason why a woman should not row like a University oar. Grace Darling was a heroine. And as for driving a four-in-hand home from Goodwood, through drunkenness, and swearing, and obscene chaff, we must remember that the whip himself was riotously tipsy, and it was a virtuous deed to pop him inside, lock him up, and mount the box herself. A gallant lass! One

would have liked to see her handling the ribbons and taking the whole rowdy, half-tipsy crew safely home. The chaperon had been married six weeks, she was just nineteen. Dover saw the progress. He was much impressed.'

'What was her beast of a father thinking of, to let her go about with such a crew?'

'To do poor Dorrien justice, he had forbidden the thing. She went without leave; that gave the zest.'

'Ah! but he had introduced the crew to his daughter. What could he expect of the effect of bad company on such a young girl? Poor, dear child! It was a good instinct that drove her to take shelter with her grandfather. She will only see good people here. There's the making of a splendid woman in that girl, Brin.'

'A fine nature warped. Ormonde was pretty hard hit on Tuesday. Fancy her netting a Duke——'

'Fancy a Duke netting *her*!' interrupted Sir Geoffrey indignantly.

'To see her in the polonaise and walking through quadrilles, no one could have believed that she had danced in public in the open street at night.'

Sir Geoffrey sighed and changed the subject. He secretly hoped that this rumour was false. In any case he could not believe that the indiscretion would ever be repeated.

Hardwin was very dreary without the vivid young face and clear voice—Hardwin, that, despite its beauty, its treasures of art, had for many a year lacked the charm of many a humble home, the grace and sweetness of a young creature on the verge of womanhood. At every step, at every turn, the old man missed this natural solace of his age. No one now kissed his rugged face, contradicted, teased or lectured him, amused him with anecdotes and mimicries, sang him ballads, made him play the organ, do this, explain that, and show the other. Poor Mrs. Hythe-Harbord acquired in these days an interest she had long lacked in her uncle's eyes. She talked of Grace, and she talked of her with affection; the old man liked to set her going, like a watch, upon this theme. He took his house-mates largely on trust, observed them little, dissected them not at all; it escaped his notice that the watch could not be made to go in the presence of Brinson.

'Yes,' that amiable being said in response to a remark from his uncle, 'the frank boyishness of cousin Jack is not the least charming trait in a fascinating personality. That leap from the turret was delightful. What a picture!'

'Delightful or not, I know no man or boy who would have had the courage—or rashness—to do it. Jove! Brin, it makes my flesh creep to remember.'

The incident occurred on the Sunday. The grandfather and granddaughter had reached the summit of the great central tower, which was flanked by four turrets, one of which, taller than the others, carried a flagstaff. It rose with its battlements some four feet above the platform of the tower itself, on which they were standing, talking of the wide prospect discernible from that great height, comparing it with the Italian plains and range of blue, snow-topped mountains unfolding to the spectator from the summit of Milan cathedral, and of the beauty of the building itself. 'Every pinnacle the statue of a saint,' Sir Geoffrey added; 'a beautiful thought and a beautiful effect—in that climate.'

'Ours would scarcely suit marble saints,' Grace returned; 'but how would sinners do? Look!'

She had seized the nearest battlement of the flag-turret, swung herself up and over, and stood sheer against the sky, stayed only by the butt of the flagstaff, the staff having been removed for repairs. Sir Geoffrey knew that the butt was not stable: it had been condemned the day before.

The battlements were a foot high, the turret about a yard in diameter. Sir Geoffrey turned giddy, seeing her figure, shortened by that foot, outlined against the sky.

'Come back, madcap, before you lose your head, and for Heaven's sake don't lean on the shaft. It's rotten. Down, Grace, down, I say!'

'It's all right. Nothing to Blondin,' was the reckless reply.

Sir Geoffrey implored and commanded, threatened and pleaded, implored and commanded again. Brinson, standing near a smaller turret with folded arms, looked on with grim interest.

'Look down, and you are lost,' he said.

She instantly looked down, and was punished by a giddiness that took the colour from her face. A light breeze rushed up, caught her hat away and blew her ample draperies out—fortunately for her—in the direction of the tower platform; she followed the draperies in a flying leap that landed her in the middle with an impetus that sent her a few steps across, and only just not over, the battlements. Sir Geoffrey raved; he vowed that he wished she had gone over and been killed, it would have served her right.

'So it would; but think how horrid it would have been for

you, and be thankful that I stuck on. There would have been a coroner's inquest, and paragraphs in the papers, and dreadful fragments of poor Grace below the tower. I wish I wasn't so fond of showing off,' she added, while her grandfather continued to splutter with indignation. 'My father says I'm the williest filly ever bred. So I am!'

On the whole Sir Geoffrey liked the incident, though it had frightened him to death. He loved this young recklessness with its large element of folly and ignorance. 'Prudence,' he often averred, 'was an insupportable vice, especially in the young.' But he wished a veil of privacy to be drawn over that jump, and took care to censure such unseemly boy's tricks. 'Why are you so childish?' he grumbled.

'It's a mark of genius. A man of genius is always a child, don't you know, so you said last night. Geniuses develop late.'

'Grace has a fund of practical wisdom,' Brinson observed, while discussing the turret incident. 'I never knew any one of her age so keenly alive to the value of money. Most people in their teens look upon money as a natural, inevitable growth, like grass, a provision of Nature, coming down like rain to supply their wants. Not so poor dear Grace. It is a pleasure to hear her talk business. Whiteley was immensely amused. "That young lady," he said, "made me render a thorough account of my stewardship in about five minutes. She knows more already of the value of the Hardwin and Harbordtown properties and the mines than her grandfather ever did." There's nothing like shifts and impecuniosity to sharpen the wits of youth. People value what they don't possess.'

'Wits keen in one thing are keen in all. No Harbord was ever a fool,' his uncle replied. 'Carrie was a clever girl. Grace is more so.'

'Carrie was not exactly worldly-wise. Her daughter is. And she actually said that she was the lawful inheritor of the whole property. Further, that in making me your successor you were committing an injustice.'

Sir Geoffrey's face darkened, his eyes burned like live coals.

'Did she say *that*?' he asked, in a deep voice, remembering what she had said on the Sunday to him. 'When did she say that?'

'Oh! one day,' he returned lightly. 'After all, how natural that she should look upon us as interlopers! Hearing the thing discussed—with probable virulence—from her cradle, she has mastered all legal points and probabilities, and naturally built

castles upon her kinship. One scarcely expects the Dorriens to enjoy the situation. No doubt they attribute selfish motives to me and mine, think me a lucky kind of stalled ox, yoked to no duties.'

'What a large-minded fellow you are, Brin, loyal old Brin! Yes; I doubt if Grace or any of them know or suspect what I owe to you. You've given me your life and I'm grateful. You might, with your talents, have made a brilliant career of your own. But you devoted all your time to a lonely deserted old man. No son would have stuck to me through thick and thin; no son would have looked after me and put up with my whims and grievances as you have. A daughter — some people's daughters, not mine—*might* have done it. It was a very bare and poor acknowledgment to put you before the world as my adopted son and heir; about the least I could do. I can but try to repay the sacrifice.'

'Sacrifice! My dear uncle, it has been the delight of my life to be of service to you—and ah!—some faint consolation. I've been——' his voice broke, he paused to gulp something down. 'I've been unfortunate—my poor wife's health—has made her an indifferent—ah! hostess—and companion. Poor Amy feels it deeply—very deeply. "Uncle Geoffrey has no comfort in me," she often says, "yet he is more kind and patient than any father." As a matter of fact, old Dover'—Mr. Hythe-Harbord was alluding to his late respected father-in-law, sixteenth Baron Dover—'used to grumble at her and tell her to make efforts and give up her shams and invalidism. And then the—the poor children——' his voice sank to a sighing whisper: there were tears in it, a subdued sob; Sir Geoffrey was deeply affected.

'Cheer up, Brin, good old Brin,' he said genially; 'better days are coming. You've been heavily afflicted, as good men often are. Your boys are delightful; Pippin is a little peculiar, certainly. But what a handsome boy! And what genius! He'll develop into some kind of singing-bird in time. As for Reginald, why, he has to have a governess to do nothing but prevent him from learning too much. A bright little chap, very like my poor sister, his grandmother. In future you must give more time to public life to divert your mind. You are just at an age to distinguish yourself in the House.'

Brinson did not like public life; no man, without fighting-fibre and enough stamina to overlook and shake off certain rough and coarse things, almost brutalities, is fit for it. He liked local honours and duties, the county bench, the shrievalty, being

president of this and that. One dead cat on a hustings, one personality, upset him beyond recovery. In art and letters his ambition was great. He wrote dainty, too faultless, verses about china, pictures, and manners; but no poetry. Personal homage was as dear to him as to a young beauty in her first season, or an old one in her last. He had the art of popularity: he remembered women's children and men's grandfathers. He could charm any woman on earth, except his wife and his cousin Grace. In small things he had the patience and self-command of a woman—when he chose; also he had the feminine, feline love of warmth, cleanliness, and quiet.

'Cousin Brimstone,' Grace happened to be saying, at the very moment when he was praising her business capacity, 'is made up of hateful virtues and unamiable vices. I can't bear him. I hate him speaking, I loathe him silent, I don't like him when he moves, and I dislike him when he is still. He can dance in an exasperating way, and dine with an air that makes you hope his food will choke him.'

'Then I suppose he does not admire you, Jack,' Laura remarked in her gentle way.

'It is highly probable, my dear; it is absolutely certain that he does not love me,' the elder sister replied. She was sitting on Laura's bed after dusk, wearing the ball-dress and opals to amuse her sister, who was almost too languid to care about seeing them.

'How can he love *you*, Jack dear?' she asked.

'How can he love anybody, Laurie? Amy trembles at his look. He hates her, because she is always ill, and can't entertain. He hates Pippin because he is not all there. He hates us because he has taken away our birthright. He likes two people: grandfather and Reginald. He *loves* Reginald. Our precious cousin is very fascinating: Mursell is infatuated with him. I mayn't give you these opals, but I can lend them to you. You shall wear them at your first dance, duckie.'

'I shall never dance, Gracie. My shroud is woven already.'

'Nonsense; you *shall* dance, Laurie. And I shall give you my pink topaz necklace. You will be quite well soon. Serious? No, I won't be serious. It's bad for you. The doctors say you are to be amused and cheered. Now, I'll show you how Judas-Jacob dances. There! I knew you would laugh.'

The ball-dress and jewels were put away, and in came a young woman in morning-dress, stepping softly with some beef-tea, that had to be coaxed, almost forced, down.

'That's right, good little Laurie, one sip more and it's done.

There! Now, I'll show you dear Grannie in a rage. Now, I'm poor Amy trembling at Brimstone-Jacob. And now, my dear, this is his Grace the Duke of Ormonde asking *your* Grace to dance. Hopelessly smitten, Laurie! He came, he saw, he *was* conquered. How would you like a duchess for a sister? Now, this is young Lord Dover, brother-in-law to cousin Judas. Not a bad fellow. Wants polish, you see. Here's old Mursie coming. She'll bundle me off. Bye-bye, little Laurie, go to bye-bye and wake good.'

Laura's recovery was slow and lingering. Poor Mrs. Dorrien was bewildered. 'There is nothing the matter with her,' she would say five times a day; 'nothing, she is only weak and languid. Else she is quite, quite well.'

When she said that to the doctor he looked very sad. At last he told her plainly that the weakness was all the matter, and that if she took another chill, even a slight one, she would probably die. Further, that she would not gain strength to resist the cold in England at that late season, October being now well advanced.

'Where must she go?' the poor mother asked.

'To the Mediterranean.'

'What shall I do, Grace?' she sobbed afterwards, turning in her extremity to her eldest child. 'There is nothing for us, not a *sou*. Your father has anticipated a year's income. Belwood being let, we were to economise in London apartments and visits to friends this winter.'

'Mother dear, you would not look at Grannie's present to me; now you must. There! That will take us all to Mentone or Nice,' she said, opening the pocket-book and taking out the cheque she had found in it.

'It is a large sum, Grace; your grandfather gives like a prince, but a thousand pounds is nothing to him. Well! it may save your sister's life, poor, dear child. We will go.' Mrs. Dorrien sighed heavily.

'It is a frightful risk,' she added, when she told Lady Wotton of her decision. 'Clarence will no doubt try to get us to Monaco. And even if I can prevent that, think what it will be to have him idle all the winter within easy reach of Monte Carlo.'

'Well, dear, you must go; it is not in your hands to decide. If he is bent on playing, he will play, wherever he is. Hope for the best, Carrie dear.'

So it came to pass that the winter and spring were passed in the Riviera, very happily by the two girls, very anxiously by Mrs. Dorrien, and very unsatisfactorily by Colonel Dorrien.

But Laura, out of doors all the sunny hours, amused and exhilarated by the beautiful scenes and novel foreign life, shook off her languor, grew an inch, and became plump and rosy.

CHAPTER X

A YEAR had passed since the daring and successful storming of Hardwin Hall; Grace's birthday had come round again, the important birthday that made her twenty-one.

'And little sense it has brought ye, Miss Greece,' was Mursell's inspiring comment upon the august occasion.

'Little anything, Mursie,' she replied. Mursell, seeing that tears were in her eyes, scolded her soundly. What had come over her joyous, wayward child in these last months, she wondered.

'It brings bad luck to cry on a birthday, Mursell? Very likely, what does not bring bad luck to us? And what does it all matter?'

'Hear till her!' cried Mursell, in great indignation, when Laura came in, delicately blooming, large-eyed and lightly built as a fairy.

'How can you be so wicked and ungrateful, Grace?' she said. 'Think of the mercies you have had this year.'

'Think of the miseries, Miss Parson, and don't talk about what you don't understand.'

'We shall winter at Mentone, Grace, and have all the old happy times over again.'

That is very easy; so easy that we are always trying it, and always finding that things never happen twice in the same way—except influenza. Last year's roses were very sweet; yet this year's, from the same bush, with the same pink petals unfolding in the same silvery curl, are different: a subtle charm has fled, or there is a fresh glamour in the new buds.

Mentone in those far-off days was a small Italian town only just becoming known as a health-resort. It had not lost its distinctive foreign charm in a flood of polyglot villas, pensions and hotels—a circumstance that did not endear it to Colonel Dorrien, who suffered much *ennui* in that pleasant quietude. Therefore he gladly accepted an invitation to go on a yachting-cruise of some weeks. When he returned he constantly found that 'business' required his presence at the seductive little capital of Monaco, so well known for its picturesque situation above the

classic Mediterranean. Well known also for its singular temple, in which the blind gods, Chance and Greed, are worshipped by earnest, hollow-eyed votaries, to the mysterious music of roulette and gold chink, and the ever-recurring chants of 'Messieurs, faites vos jeux,' 'Le jeu est fait'; a temple noteworthy as one of the few in which the worshippers are in real, downright earnest, and not ashamed to display the ardent zeal that consumes them. Who, having once heard and seen, can ever forget, the golden music, golden glitter of heaped coin at the shrine of these holy and peace-inspiring deities? Colonel Dorrien dreamed nightly of that mellow rhythm, as a new schoolboy dreams of home; the gold-piled green altar was sweet to him as a child's fairy home-meadow flooded with cowslips. But to Mrs. Dorrien the cult was alien and abhorrent; she found little charm in the lovely drive along a mountainous coast to the shrine; she misprized the beauty of the holy city built up on its steep promontory, below engirdling mountains, above an all-surrounding sea. The girls loved the drive; but there came a time when Grace found it even more distasteful than her mother did.

The first weeks on the pleasant Mediterranean shore were peaceful and sweet to the three ladies. Laura was quite happy, lying out in the sunshine and absorbing the beauty of the sunny sea, and shore and mountains; her mother and sister quite happy in the interest she began to take in her surroundings. At first she used to order her coffin every day, commanding Grace to lay flowers on her tomb, but on no account to weep for her loss: the mere thought of her impending early demise brought tears, exquisite tears, of combined hysteria, self-pity, and weakness, to her own eyes. Very soon her obsequies were arranged only on occasional mornings, then once a week, next a fortnight would pass with no reference to her latter end, and only a gloomy morning or some little ailment would recall the mournfully pleasant prospect of her bereaved family and carefully tended grave. Then it was that her sister revolted and steadfastly declined to listen.

'If you must howl, howl about something else,' she said; 'I'm sick of the cemetery business.'

'Oh, Jack dear, how cruel you are! How sorry you will be for this when I am no more.'

'No, I shan't, I shall be glad I prevented you from making such a morbid little donkey of yourself.'

'But, Jack dear, you will—you *will* try to be a better girl when I'm gone, won't you?—and to be more thoughtful?' she sobbed.

'No, I won't! I'm too thoughtful already. And as for being a better girl if you were to die—which you won't—what would be the sense of it when you couldn't know? So, you see, you 'll have to get better on purpose to preach to me.'

'Cruel, unkind girl! You speak as if I could help dying.'

'So you can, if you do all the doctor tells you. In any case you can leave off bothering people about it. Get up and dress, you stupid little owl; it is going to be a fine day. We 'll go up through the olives and sketch.'

Early in the new year Colonel Dorrien, newly returned from his cruise, had discovered the invalided son of an old comrade at the hotel nearest their villa, very weak, and confined to his room; he said it would be a charity to visit the poor fellow and cheer him up. Mrs. Dorrien, of course, fulfilled this obvious duty and sent Mursell to him with books and flowers. When the invalid was well enough to walk out, he strolled up to the terraced gardens of Villa Bellosguardo one fine morning. Laura was lying out in a deck-chair in the noon sunshine; Grace, sitting near her, saw the wasted figure of the stranger stagger as it approached, and at once jumped up and hastened to offer her arm to the young man, who turned red and hesitated to accept it.

'It must be Miss Dorrien,' he said, stopping to get his breath and conceal his feebleness. 'I am that Mark Hilton to whom so much kindness has been shown.'

'Of course you are and of course I am! And how glad we are that you can walk again!' was the cheerful reply, in a fresh full voice, that charmed him and filled him with new vitality. She helped him to a chair at Laura's side: 'Here is Captain Hilton, Laura,' she said, and then went to fetch her father and mother; when more chairs and wine and fruit were brought.

This young man, fresh from war and wounds, and the excessive fatigue and subsequent illness of the long defence of Lucknow, could scarcely bear the rush of happiness and returning health brought by this sudden admittance to the cheery family-party. Grace, in her fresh healthy bloom, springing up and hastening to help him, her dark eyes soft and shining, her tall figure supple and graceful, her arm supporting him, made a picture he never forgot, or wished to forget. She knew exactly how to put cushions comfortably in his lounging-chair, and decreed what he should eat and drink at the out-of-door luncheon; it was equally odd and delightful to be ordered about and mothered by such a young and handsome woman. The garden, looking down on olives and carobs, aloes and lemon groves, peach and mimosa

bloom, and three dark pine-tops traced on the deep blue sea, looked to him like the garden of Eden.

The girls had woven an aureole of impossible heroism and mysterious suffering about this wounded officer, their father had talked much of him and of Lucknow, the unknown agony of which had been the principal thing in the mind of England for months past. One feature of that long heroic defence was the great fatigue prolonged through many consecutive weeks. The little English garrison had not only to fight all day and watch all night, but also to bury their dead and do all service and every kind of drudgery, officers and men alike, and this on scant rations of poor and unwholesome food. It was, indeed, a marvel of endurance.

What manner of man these girls expected they probably did not know, except that he was to be about seven feet high. What they really saw on that sunny morning was a feeble skeleton of middle height, with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, a hesitating manner, and a harassed look. His slightly aquiline features were sharp with suffering; his fair hair looked strange on a face of the most singular hue these girls had ever beheld, so brown and yet so pale, with an absolutely white streak at the top of the forehead. The great disenchantment of his actual appearance was heightened by an absence of visible scars, a defect somewhat atoned for by the happy discovery made by Grace's quick eyes of a *tulwar* cut, beginning under the collar, and only visible when he bent his head. No one ever heard of a hero without scars; they expected an arm in a sling at least; this half-hidden wound exercised the imagination; it suggested other unseen scars, but was not enough to confer real distinction upon him. He was renamed the Disenchantment.

On the first day he scarcely spoke, but looked peacefully, unutterably happy, lounging with half-closed eyes like a tired child. The scent of fresh white violets growing in an old wall, where bright-eyed lizards darted in the sun, and of orange and lemon blossom, carnations, tea-roses and mignonette, blending with the almondy smell of a dusty yellow mimosa bush, produced a delicious feeling like the glamour of a pleasant dream. Waves broke in rhythmic pause below, oars plashed distantly; *grelots* tinkled on harness of passing horses, voices and light laughter from this family-party completed the music. Laura, oblivious of coffins and graves, exquisitely fair, with brilliant rose cheeks, was not the least attractive of the two: her face was more restful to look on than her sister's vivid, sparkling countenance; her

languor had a charm for one so worn and wasted himself. Mrs. Dorrien's tall form and distinguished air were enhanced by a face marked, but unconquered, by the sorrows and thoughts of nearly half a century. Colonel Dorrien, though too red in the face, and showing too clearly in coarsened features what his life had been, was still an impressive figure. All were anxious to amuse and please this taciturn ghost of a guest, who lingered and lingered until lengthening shadows broke up the party.

He found his way to Villa Bellosguardo again and then again, until the Disenchantment became a recognised member of the circle. Each time he came his shadow was broader and his face less ghastly; he never talked much—perhaps that made him such a good listener. It was not long before Colonel Dorrien discovered that the Disenchantment or Shadow, as they called him, was slow; a circumstance that threw the latter more than ever on the mercies of the ladies, to whom he soon became most useful. When they made excursions on mules, it was an advantage to have a man to arrange everything; on the water he rowed, sculled, and managed a sail with Grace; when they drove, a pleasure often spoilt by the drivers' cruelty to horses, he could make the men drive properly; at the Villa Bellosguardo receptions he was often mistaken for a son of the house. Mursell approved of him, scolded and made use of him. Some distinction, much promise, a little money, and influential friends were the Shadow's. His father was a general officer, now campaigning in India; his mother long dead. Captain Hilton's chief joy was to watch Laura's delicate face and attend to her numerous wants, according to Grace and Mursell; Mrs. Dorrien thought that something else gave him still greater pleasure.

One day in mid-February, when this convenient person made his daily appearance in the garden where Mrs. Dorrien and Laura sat with needlework and newspapers, Grace, sitting a little apart with a book, did not raise her eyes from the page or say 'Good-morning' to him.

'Very fascinating,' he commented.

'So it seems,' Mrs. Dorrien replied, with a little smile, suddenly remembering that her eldest daughter had not been in disgrace for months.

'She has a blue-stocking fit; she is mad about Italian,' Laura explained. The Disenchantment said that he was mad on the same subject. Grace suddenly looked up with flushed cheeks and strained eyes.

'Won't Tasso scan?' he asked, going to her side, solving the problem, and remaining with her.

Laura's needlework dropped from her hand, she looked idly at the blossom-flushed steep declining to the sunny sea; hum of bees, plash of waves, wind-murmur in branches, and low, distant voices lulled her to sleep. Her mother looked yearningly at the peaceful young face, thinking, hoping, fearing, and then beginning to drowse herself, conscious still of Italian words in two voices. Strange for Grace to be still and studious for so long, even to teach herself a language. After all, the troublesome child was quieting down.

'It has been a great help, Captain Hilton,' Grace said, when the book had to be shut at the end of a long morning.

'Shall we help each other to-morrow?' he asked, without eagerness.

'It would be stunning. What is Italian for stunning? Oh yes, mother, I *will* give up slang. Let us talk Italian instead. And Persian—I should like to know Persian and Hindostanee and Sanscrit.'

Then it was always, 'Buon giorno, Signore,' 'Alla rivederla, Signorina,' and Tasso and grammars and dictionaries. And one day Grace said to Laura—

'Isn't it odd; the Shadow can't flirt?'

'Did you try hard enough, Gracie?' the ingenuous child returned in her meek way.

'Don't be impertinent, Miss Baby; I mean—he's so *queer*. I never before met a man who didn't make love to me—of course I don't count married and engaged men, though—Well! the Shadow is a new type. Perhaps he's just had a bad jilt. Or perhaps she was killed—at Cawnpore! Poor Shadow!'

'Oh, no; she isn't dead,' Laura maintained; 'he's much too happy for her to be dead. Perhaps she's waiting for him to go home and marry her.'

'Very likely. So that he's as good as married. It is very handy for us. It's like a girl friend, only much better. No, it is like a brother. I always envied girls with brothers. Laurie dear, I do so wish I had never carried on with anybody. It's so —so *vulgar*, and *so* silly—and such poor fun at best.'

'You ought to know, Jack dear, if experience teaches. No letter from grandfather?'

'No. Foul play, Laurie; Cousin Judas again.'

Sir Geoffrey had written twice in affectionate terms; Christmas had brought a ring from him. And now three of Grace's letters were unanswered, the postman was anxiously awaited, and all Grace's thoughts were coloured by the fear that something

had poisoned that friendship. She tried not to think of it; she devoured books, those recommended by the Shadow, who seemed to know everything, especially history. The sad discovery that she was a perfect dunce, very silly and extremely crude, oppressed her: the consciousness of her defective education, aroused by contact with culture and intellect at Hardwin, deepened in the society of cultivated invalidish people at Mentone, and especially in that of the Shadow, who was always—like the Hardwin people—making allusions beyond her understanding.

'And what *is* a palimpsest?' she never hesitated to say if she did not understand. The Shadow's personal estimate of her was a quantity not worth considering. What if he fell in love with her? Nothing; everybody did; that was a matter of course, there was no help for it. But of this she thought not at all. Besides, he seemed not so much a man as a convenient source of information and unconscious exponent of fresh standards, moral, intellectual, and social, as well as being generally handy.

One day, during the perusal of Tasso, when the battle was hot, the infidel flying before the pious Godfrey of Boulogne, and prodigies of valour enacted by the young Rinaldo, she heard the din of clashing swords, battered helms, and breaking spears in the thunderous onset of those olden cavaliers, who endured and survived so many hand-to-hand fights, and the joy and madness of battle entered the heart of this soldier's daughter. 'How fine to live then! How magnificent to be Clorinda, her golden curls, the oft-mentioned *chiome d'oro*, imprisoned in her helmet and loosened by the stroke of Tancred's spear! The crusades were real, and glorious as real!' Tasso was forgotten in a long musing fit.

They were seated in the old, sunny garden nook, the sea lying blue and beautiful before them, the scent of many flowers, quieting sounds, and hum of bees in the air. Of a sudden it came into her head that the young man reading out that chivalrous old song of valorous crusaders and glamour-blinded knights was fresh from actual warfare, more heroic and terrible than any onset of mailed men in the poem. There was the *tulwar* cut, red and new, just visible as he bent over the book; the bronze of Eastern suns still masked the blonde English face; the arm holding the book had hewn down dark Paynims in as good a cause as that of the crusades. *Il pio Goffredo* was not more saintly than Havelock and Outram. To spend hours in reading of those olden warriors when he had but now been acting epics? The man was a poem himself.

'And that 's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn.'

'You are tired, Miss Grace? Losing interest?' he asked, looking up from the melodious verse. 'Only thinking? And of what?'

'I was thinking—of India—and of modern knights, and—*Lucknow*. What an epic you have been acting!' she said in a slow, melodious voice, her flushed cheek stayed on her long hand, her eyes brilliant.

He looked away over the sea, a flush running over his face under the brown.

'Ah! so,' he said. 'Yes!—h'm! But you know,' he added, 'Tasso's fighting and strategy is really very well done. The councils of war are so good. Suppose you read the next page, I 'll listen.'

Personal or extraneous remark was so unusual that it was remembered, with scent of violets, hum of bees, Mediterranean blueness and murmur..

Tasso finished, Dante was soon begun, and with him a new world entered. Beatrice had already excited interest in pictures at Hardwin and some hints of the *Vita Nuova* there. Why were these lovers never married? When and where did they meet and part? At the age of nine! 'Laura, this will interest you.'

'We are both listening,' Mrs. Dorrien—never far from the Italian students—replied, 'but I am not clear about Dante and Beatrice. The story is confused in my memory. Can you tell us, Captain Hilton?'

In few and simple words, with a gaze always looking far away over the wide calm sea, on the charmed waves of which halcyons might have been brooding, the world's greatest, loftiest love-story was related to three attentive, charmed listeners.

'Marriage not even desired!' Grace's gaze was absorbed in the vast blueness below, Mrs. Dorrien had never before quite grasped the spirituality of the sentiment of the *Vita Nuova*, she said.

'Sentiment? Nay; passion, etherealised and intensified to white flame.'

Then the three ladies heard of Platonism, of the creation of twin souls, separated by walls of physical being, destined to seek each other and mingle throughout eternity, and of the celestial Aphrodite; and it gradually became apparent to them that Dante's immortal love was the exquisite blossom of thirteen centuries of Christianity, grafted upon the culmination of all that was noblest

in pagan Greek thought. The *Divina Commedia* slipped from the reader's brown hand during the exposition, Mrs. Dorrien dropped her work, her face became pensive and wistful; Laura's graceful head drooped like a blossom on its stem till she dozed off. Grace, still as a statue, gazed fixedly on the blue sea-breadth blending with blue sky, her eyes, wide and dark, conscious of nothing but these strange new emotions and far-reaching thoughts revealed through the soul of that great poet, who was the greatest heart and intellect that ever lived, the greatest man of the greatest nation in the whole world, after Greece—the passion-torn Florentine exile. The others rose and went away presently, leaving her silent, rapt, absorbed in thoughts of such unusual force as often make vital, organic change in lives.

Once the Shadow spent a day at Genoa, whence he brought an enormous cake as a tender souvenir for Mrs. Dorrien, who laughed intermittently whenever her gaze fell on it, to the surprise and secret displeasure of the giver. Could there be any hidden significance in a gift of cake? 'Then *why* do you laugh, dear Mrs. Dorrien?' with grave reproach.

Crushed by the indignity offered to his Genoese souvenir, it was with profound sadness, and after some hesitation, that the Shadow took courage to request and receive permission to give Laura some filigree beads of the famed Genoese work, when his wounded feelings were soothed by the appreciation of the whole family.

'Nothing really *wrong* in cake?' was his earnest question when he left; upon which Mrs. Dorrien laughed again in a helpless way that amazed the girls.

'Nothing, nothing,' she replied hastily. 'It is eminently respectable and absolutely moral—besides being very nice to eat, dear Captain Hilton.'

'You are *quite* sure?' was the earnest rejoinder, accompanied by a wistful gaze and warm pressure of Mrs. Dorrien's hand.

'I don't see the joke,' observed the father of the family on hearing this touching incident at dinner. 'But it strikes me that Hilton is pretty far gone on the little 'un. Jack, old boy, you're left out in the cold for once.'

'That I am,' she replied; 'hard lines, dad, isn't it? Really, though, it was a little too marked. The Shadow is all very well as a walking dictionary and general handy man—but his *manners*! What *is* the matter with mother? She does nothing but laugh to-day. Great donkey!—Of course I don't mean you, mother—I mean that owl of a Hilton—turning as red as a lobster and

stammering—looking at me as much as to say—I ought to have given her something, but 'pon my soul I forgot her existence. I must confess that I prefer *gentlemen* to ill-bred donkeys.'

'Hang it, Jack; you must not expect to come in first in every race,' said her father; 'the little 'un can't always be distanced. What's this, eh?' taking a packet brought in by a servant. 'Miss Dorrien. Jove, Jack, it's for you!'

'Owl!' grumbled the recipient. 'What idiocy now? I shouldn't a bit wonder if he were to apologise for forgetting me I really think he is fool enough for anything.'

'He?' echoed her father. 'Poor Captain Hilton,' observed Mrs. Dorrien, while Grace scornfully tore the envelope open, jerking out a little silver-papered something on the table-cloth before her.

'Precious innocent! He hadn't the courage,' she commented angrily. 'I never knew such an absolute, unmitigated idiot in my whole life. I certainly never encountered worse manners or viler taste. "Implores my forgiveness for the liberty"—I dare-say. "Ventures to offer"—Donkey!—"small *souvenir*, Genoese handicraft."—All this row about his wretched tin soldiers!'

'But you haven't looked at it, Jack dear,' Laura remonstrated.

'Looked at it? Not I,' tossing the little packet aside, 'what do I want with his pinchbeck absurdities—h'm! a cross—"Appropriate symbol" indeed!'

'What could be more appropriate? I've never seen you crosser, Jack dear. Would you rather have my beads? Let us change.'

'Rather have a fiddlestick! As if it was of the smallest consequence! But I do dislike fools. Just fancy a grown man writing to say he hadn't the courage to offer a girl a bit of twisted pinchbeck. Noodle! Dad dear, next time you go to Monaco I shall go too. But do let us go somewhere else, Florence, for instance. Why shouldn't we go home by Rome? Just to see the fountains of Trevi, and drink of them, and so be fated to come again to Rome. And *one* ride over the Campagna.'

'*And* the Shadow to explain everything, and carry my cushions,' Laura added.

'A little substance would come handier,' Grace suggested with sudden amiability. 'How much would a Roman trip cost?'

The unfortunate Shadow in the meantime was much crestfallen at receiving no answer by the messenger who had taken the parcel to the Villa. His mental outlook was of the gloomiest; he began again to suspect some occult devilry in his unfortunate

gift of cake. All sorts of horrors presented themselves to his excited imagination: he saw himself an outcast from Villa Bellosguardo, the object of Colonel Dorrien's wrath and indignation, and of Mursell's contempt—a blighted man. He passed a sleepless night, the prey of remorse, misgivings, and fears.

Gloomily shaving, and cherishing dark thoughts connected with razors, next morning, the sight through the window of Mursell approaching the hotel, produced agitation, a slip, a cut, and a monosyllable expressing wrath. No answer was needed to the billet Mrs. Mursell brought and he anxiously opened.

'Miss Dorrien presents her compliments to Captain Hilton,'—the third person; all was over; fortunately the razors were handy and very sharp—'and graciously'—what?—'deigns to pardon him for sending her a filigree cross.'

What a world, sunshine, blossom, blue sea, blue mountains, rosy hopes! What delicious air! People spoke of the gloom of olive woods; he would allow sobriety, even pensiveness, but cheery pensiveness; and what subtlety of delicate tints! Pardon is a beautiful word, the parent of peace.

CHAPTER XI

'WHY, Jack,' Colonel Dorrien said, 'what a model you are! Always wanting to go about with your old dad. I'm afraid you find the place very slow.'

'Slow or not, dad, I was never so happy in my life as I've been here. Yet I've not so much as seen a horse, much less hunted, the whole winter long. The one thing that bothers me is grandfather not writing.'

'It can't be anything you did or said at Hardwin, else he wouldn't have written those three letters or sent the Christmas box. I really almost begin to believe what you say of Brinson Hythe. All that history of the mastiffs and refusing your card is queer. Such excessive friendship won't hold water. But you should see the letters he writes to your mother.'

'I should indeed,' she replied fervently, 'but mother won't let me. Mother is blind, hoodwinked. What lies has Cousin Judas been telling of me, I wonder? I've behaved so beautifully all the winter; the truth couldn't set the dear old man against me. And as for flirting, daddy dear, I've scarcely seen a man. The Shadow doesn't count, and if he did, I have never been a minute alone with him.'

This was not literally true; for one damp Sunday, the Colonel being away and Mrs. Dorrien at home with Laura, Grace and Captain Hilton had walked back from church together, accompanied for the first quarter-mile by the English chaplain. She was wearing the little cross; the chaplain had been talking of the best way to go home before the hot weather; the Shadow had been respectfully listening until they left the chaplain at his own house, when he began with a rush—

'I have been wanting to say something for weeks, something for your ear alone, Miss Dorrien.'

She threw a suspicious glance at him: 'You too,' it seemed to say.

'You will not like it; it will give you pain. Forgive me beforehand.'

'Certainly not. You'd better not say it if it wants forgiveness.'

'I must, even if it makes you hate me. Lookers-on see most of the game——

'Quite so. *Après?*'

'Mrs. Dorrien is naturally absorbed in your sister; Colonel Dorrien is bored; time hangs heavy on his hands.'

'Poor dear old dad, it's quite true. But what is to be done?'

'He is much attached to his eldest daughter; she amuses him; she has much influence on him—more than she has any idea of, probably.'

'Well?'

'If you don't mind taking a piece of disinterested advice, you will be with him as much as possible, dear Miss Dorrien. You will give up everything to amuse and interest your father,' he said with gravity.

She walked on in silence, her heart throbbing, her eyes scalding. He had seen the skeleton, of the existence of which she was only beginning to be aware. Yet who that knew the Dorriens could fail to see it? Tears began to drop slowly from poor Jack Dorrien's eyes; her companion was stung by them; one fell on the little cross, bediamonded by a sunbeam just striking through sunset storm-cloud.

'What a beast I am!' he groaned.

'You don't mean it as a beast,' she sobbed, stopping, resting her arms on a wall and her face in her hands.

'I'll go away, shall I?'

'No, no; I'm only crying; I've left off now.'

The Shadow groaned; he smote himself savagely on the

chest; his companion soon raised her head and dried her face.

'I 'm afraid of boring him,' she said, after pocketing her handkerchief, putting up her hand like a child to dash off a lingering tear.

'Ah! don't be afraid; you must not be afraid. He is *so* fond of you.'

'*Dear* old dad! He is *so* good and kind. Nobody ever had such a good father, Captain Hilton.'

'I know it. I have the greatest admiration for Colonel Dorrien,' said the Shadow mendaciously. 'I 'm a slow fellow and poor company for such a man. There 's not enough go in me. I know nothing of society; and he 's so brilliant.'

Poor Shadow! nobody knew what that conversation cost him, least of all Grace.

'You don't hate me, I hope?' was his melancholy question as they turned into the villa grounds.

'Oh no! I am much obliged to you for speaking out. Are you coming in to tea? Do. They will be so glad to have somebody to speak to this wet day.'

The invitation was not too flattering; but beggars must not be choosers. The Shadow was grateful for the privilege of sitting by the wood-fire and being permitted to look upon Laura's sweet, soft face. Mrs. Dorrien expanded and bloomed out in his company in a way that amazed her children.

'I never knew mother so civil to anybody in my life,' Grace said to Laura; 'one might almost think her in love with him. I must say he is extremely nice to her. His manner is perfect. Such a fine blend of cordiality and respect, such deference to her opinions, such anticipation of her wishes!'

'You are a strange girl,' Laura commented. 'Three days ago you couldn't abuse his manners enough.'

'*La donna è mobile*, Laura *mia*.'

The road from Mentone to Monaco is accounted one of the most picturesque in the world. Colonel Dorrien never wearied of it; sometimes, but not often, he drove—that was when accompanied by his ladies; when alone, five miles there and five miles back was but wholesome exercise for an old soldier in average health. Yet, in spite of his great enjoyment of the walk along the coast, now down by the sea, now far above it, with picture after picture, of bay and promontory and rocky headland, opening before him, with splendour of sunset often dyeing the whole in rich and changing colour, he usually returned to Mentone in a

mental condition that was the reverse of agreeable—sometimes irritable, sometimes morose, sometimes dull and gloomy, and sometimes—but that was rare—in wild spirits. Mrs. Dorrien disliked every mood equally. Laura loved Monaco; it had no thorn for her. Why, she asked, should they not stay there altogether? It was warmer and more sheltered than Mentone. But Grace had soon wearied of beauties that at first had kindled her warmest enthusiasm; when Laura asked why she had turned so completely against it, she only repeated her frequent explanation, '*La donna è mobile.*'

But then these mountains rising above their olive-clad foothills, the rocky steep, clothed the winter long with blossom and verdure, washed by soft white surf and garlanded with geranium and prickly pear; the purple gloom of the deep ravine, the beauty of the heathery hill and new gardens at Monte Carlo, the band, the sunshine, the babbling brook, the convenient hotel and new Casino,—all these charms Laura urged in defence. She was told that an insidious poison lurked in the balmy, sunny sea-air of this earthly paradise.

'Quite so,' her mother corroborated; 'Grace is right, Laura dear; I am too wretched for words at Monaco. If a high tide rose and swept the two headlands away and left nothing but a flat band of swampy ooze behind, I should be glad.'

But there are no high tides in the land-locked Mediterranean, and earthquakes never come just when they are wanted.

'I thought it was too good to last, Mursell,' Mrs. Dorrien sighed to the faithful servant; 'Grace quiet and devoted to study was indeed a marvellous portent to me—I could scarcely believe my eyes. But her giving it all up is so sudden. I suppose it was a novel kind of flirtation for her. And now——'

'Eh! missie dear; it's no natural to a lightsome young lassie like Miss Greece to be minding her book for ever,' Mursell replied. 'Dinna fash yourself, Miss Carrie, dear. 'Twas the laddie drew her to the book-learning. Now she knows he's no for her, she's off with him. Little Miss Laurie is the attraction; well Miss Greecie knows that.'

'Do you really think so, Mursell?'

'Ay, I have no doubt, mem. The Captain canna take his eyes from Miss Laurie, and well for her it is, poor lamb; better than all the physic in the world. Over eighteen the lassie is, and no a sweetheart till now. It's life to these yoong things.'

'My poor little Laurie,' Mrs. Dorrien sighed; 'I am not at all sure of it, Mursell. I wish I were, for the young man is one of

the few who are able to make women happy. My daughters, Sir Geoffrey's granddaughters, might look higher—But oh! Mursell, what is rank, what is wealth, what is anything, with a bad, unsteady husband? Love? Love only'—a slight sob—'only makes the misery deeper.'

'Ay, missie dear; it's true. And this young gentleman is steady as a rock. 'Tis a kind-hearted laddie and religious. Did ye see him in the Kirk? He never misses, and even stays to Sacrament. His eyes always on the book or cast down. No keeking round at the lasses with him. And a good sojer, and no ill-favoured. Happy will be the leddy he chooses. And it's Miss Laurie he's set on.'

Was it indeed Laura? At any rate Captain Hilton was quite contented, apparently, to be left in the lurch by Grace, and was as constant as before her defection in his attendance at Bellosguardo, though there was now rarely any Italian reading. Grace was always on the wing, always wanting to go somewhere, never still. It was, 'Daddie, dear; let us go to Ventimiglia or to Roccabruna.' 'Why not spend a day or two at Genoa? Captain Hilton found it most interesting?'

'I'll wager he did,' her father would reply. 'He had no long-limbed daughter to drag him about and make him buy filigree and poke over show places.'

Then she would propose mountain excursions far too long for Laura, or it was, 'Dad, we must go to Nice for the carnival. You must rise to your duties. I want all the fun of the fair, and you must chaperon me.' The devoted parent groaned, but he obeyed. He threw flowers and *confetti*, and enjoyed it. He hired windows to sit in, and carriages to drive in, and took no small pride in the admiration his tall girl evoked wherever they went. Of course, Monaco saw less of him in consequence of these diversions, and of course he was a pleasanter companion to his family when he returned to them, than during his assiduous attendance at the temple of the Monacan divinities. But a worm will turn, and although he sighed as a worshipper and obeyed as a father, he occasionally rebelled, and insisted upon journeying to the shrine of his devotion.

'After all,' Grace would say, when she perceived that he had taken the bit in his mouth and meant to have his head, 'Monaco is delightfully situated; the bloom upon those distant olive-groves is like nothing else in the world. I'll go with you, daddie dear.'

Then Mrs. Dorrien would make some bitter observation,

Grace would look at her with a singular expression, and Laura would say, '*La donna è mobile.*'

'The Dorrien blood is restless, Laura dear,' her mother would comment. 'Something new, something it has not, is ever what it covets. Will you never be constant to anything, Grace? Curb yourself while young, or misery will curb you when old.'

'I 'll take care never to be old, mother. Ta-ta, darlings! *A rivederci!*'

The sun was already very powerful in mid-March; Colonel Dorrien wished to drive to Monaco. 'We shall fizzle audibly in this heat, Jack, and your complexion will be ruined for life,' he grumbled.

'Good for my vanity, dad. But you forget that the main charm of Monaco is its approach. Let us wind about the mountain paths and take it leisurely, arrive there in time for luncheon, hear the band, have coffee and as many cigars as you like, and go home in time to dress for dinner.'

Then it was that Colonel Dorrien looked searchingly at the innocent, inscrutable face of his firstborn. 'I tell you what it is, Jack,' he began—then stopped. 'After all,' he thought, 'she is a woman grown, and has all her wits about her. Who can blame her for trying to keep the old man straight? Poor child!'

The five miles were done very leisurely; there were so many reasons for stopping to rest here, to look out there, to hear the history of this, to ask the meaning and history of that. Then luncheon took a long time; he was beguiled into another and another cigar afterwards. The grounds of the new Monte Carlo Casino offered such charming prospects either way, by land or sea; the scent of beds of tea-roses and bushes of carnations was so enchanting—had he ever seen the like of that town-crested rock rising sheer from the clear blue water? What vivid colour the geraniums gave, and those palms—how rich in suggestion they were, and how rarely beautiful, outlined upon the sunny, dark-blue sea! Could he leave all this loveliness for that stuffy, hideous Casino? How soft the olive-yards showed in their pearly grey foliage on the mountain flank, then the ravine with its purple shadows, and the band beginning *Der Freischütz!* Such an exceptional day!

These tactics could not always be successful: the weather was not always perfect; the beauty was not always novel; the good Colonel turned restive if too severely curbed; he would enter the darkened shrine, recommending Grace to sit in the sunny air and listen to the band. But, after all, why should she not look

in? Anything for a change. So together one fine afternoon they left the bright and balmy paradise of nature, the charm of mountain and sea, of sun and wave and flower, and entered the dark close hell of greed and fear, agony and covetousness, evil pleasure and fevered excitement. Whirr went the roulette, click the baleful, fateful little ball on which so much depended, chink the muck-rake, gathering in the piles of silver, gold, and paper.

'*Messieurs et mesdames, faites vos jeux!*' chanted the officiating priest.

The worshippers, some of whom came to scoff and remained to play, some to look on or to catch a new sensation, but the majority in devout earnest, instantly responded, tremblingly placing stakes, daringly here, defiantly there; there were hard faces, glittering eyes, strained features intent on gain, instinct with horrid lust of gold, men and women, old and young. Grace had seen the rites before; she did not love them, but they had a horrible fascination for her. Old stagers sometimes asked her to choose numbers for them: she had a lucky face; she did not refuse; she was amused at her own success. As for that devout worshipper, Colonel Dorrien, he was soon absorbed, dead to all but the words of the ritual and the devil's dance of the capricious ball, his eyes bent on the intricate lines and figures of the roulette table, his ears attentive to the cries, hesitating, with knitted brows and pursed lips, as he reckoned up the chances of this square and that cross. Then perhaps, after all, he dropped his stake chance-medley and waited with tense expectation while the banker twirled the capstan, staking went on, the ball danced till it was still, and some such cry as '*Cinq—rouge—impair—manque*,' multiplied his winnings or lost his stakes.

Grace looked on his face once during these rites, but never again; the curse of Canaan was far from her. She looked instead on the squares and figures, the red and white spaces of the roulette, and marvelled at the dexterous ease with which the croupier raked the complicated stakes in and out to their destination; she watched her father's play, never knowing whether the pile was coming to him or from him till it came or went. The clutch of hands on the gold-heaps sickened her, her father's well-known shapely hand became a claw, thick-veined, distorted. She wondered once why he never asked her to play for him; then, reflecting, was glad, and honoured him for it.

But on this particular afternoon, having been asked to play for others, and having listened to the chants and looked upon the money-heaps, the spirit of the place entered her heart; she took a

five-franc piece from her pocket and placed it at random. The sharp cry, '*Trois, rouge, impair, manque,*' conveyed little to her mind, till she found a whole glittering pile of gold and silver pushed quickly to her and pocketed it with horrid pleasure. Again she staked and won; her stakes multiplied, as it seemed to her, at hap-hazard, thirty-six times or five times—all seemed arbitrary. Then, after six lucky shots, each stake larger than the other, she lost about half her winnings. Then she won again.

By this time her veins ran fire, her lips were parched, the genius of the place possessed her; she was conscious of nothing but the fevered thirst of gold. As she staked and listened, and clutched and staked again, the devil whispered soft things, kindling things, in her ear. Visions of a fortune in a day, of untold wealth danced into her hands by the demon ball she heard clicking from compartment to compartment from the whirling bowl, rose before her. This stigma and restraint, this wasting perpetual fret of poverty gone, no fear of bills, no cause to impute sordid motives to her invasion of Hardwin, her mother calm, Laura dressed, amused, and cared for, like others of her age and position, her father supplied with the amusements and interests of men of his class. These things, seductive, rose-hued, fed the fever fire within her, gave a sinister lustre to her beauty, devoured her with evil eagerness, made her clutch the glittering coin with an answering glitter in eyes usually soft and guileless, made her heart throb with hard, fierce strokes. She was unconscious of angry, envious, despairing eyes upon her, unconscious that her father had ceased to play in the keener excitement of her gains, unconscious that the banker was growing more and more anxious and twirled the capstan with a shaking hand, unconscious of the hellish brood of thoughts and feelings engendered by her own gratified covetousness. That inaudible curses hissed round her, hate encircled her, all eyes centred upon her from the serried rows edging the green altar of Mammon, she neither knew nor cared; a spot of burning crimson was in each cheek, dark hollows beneath her eyes made their fierce, hard glitter fiercer. Eyes that loved her looked upon the transformed face, wondering if indeed this were Grace Dorrien, or some simulacrum raised by enchantment and inspired by a demon. Click-click went the roulette and was still; but *Trente, pair, rouge, passe,* was the cry, and she had staked on *noir, impair.* A sound—a savage sound—escaped the burning crimson lips—surely a curse. Her father touched her shoulder,—

'Jack, Jack, come away,' he murmured, trembling.

Scarcely conscious of the touch, she shook it angrily off, staked the highest sum permitted and won it many times over, a sum in four figures. Then she lost twice, and won again and again. People came and went. A great shining heap of coin was raked before her, when suddenly, with its baleful gleam reflected in her eyes, she looked up into a face immediately opposite her on the other side of the table behind the players, a mesmeric face from which she could not withdraw her gaze.

The glitter left her eyes, the hot colour her cheeks, the gold lay untouched before her, the familiar summons, '*Faites vos jeux*,' was unheeded and unanswered. As she looked, her own natural face with its charm of youth and beauty returned to her, the fever in her veins calmed, the hardness went out of the fresh young lips, the soft dark eyes deepened and clouded with tears, the frank guilelessness came back. Then, with sorrow and shame and a drooping face, she turned and went out, followed by her father—out into the scented crimson afterglow, and sat down on a bench by a mimosa bush with her face in her hands.

What she had seen in the eyes bent upon her in pain and shame, mingled with deep tenderness and wounded reverence not yet slain, she scarcely knew but never forgot. The eyes were good and brave, full of noble thought and pure feeling, of chivalry and loyalty, of gentleness and kindness—eyes that had seen much, endured much, and pitied more—the grave blue eyes of Mark Hilton.

'My fault,' her father said. 'It is no place for a girl, Grace. You shall never go there again—never.'

'It is hell,' she sobbed. 'Father, I will never, never play again my whole life long. But if you enter that hell, I must follow.'

'Never again, Gracie—word of honour, girl.' He stood erect and still, as if on guard before her in the fading glow, strange hidden deeps touched and stirred in his heart. His own young daughter, the one cherished, spotless treasure of his heart, trembling on the brink of that black abyss—the thought was enough to stir the shallowest nature. Vice is always easy, often delightful, but in the beloved, the guarded, an own vice, passing down with the blood, a deadly heirloom! He was not fond of a woman's tears, but he was glad of Grace's; the child was his own again. The hard woman at the gaming table, with glittering eyes and fiercely avid face, was a stranger, a changeling.

'I wish to Heaven I hadn't meddled,' Mark Hilton said next day; 'I did not think——'

'You never heard of fast Jack Dorrien? You know her now. It 's a poor nature that can't resist temptation.'

'It is a golden nature—that knows its weakness and conquers it.'

'Gold? I hate the sound—*L'oro, l'or, Gold.* Are they not all vile? Isn't money the root-curse of the world?'

'Hard to say what *is* the root-curse; there are so many. There are blessings too. And one is——'

She looked up at this standstill, wondering. His face was grave, the blue eyes burnt with still fire, the slender figure, with the strength and quiver of a lance, expressed reserves of spiritual power; something of awe and sweetness, something magnetic, trust-inspiring, irresistible, in this face attracted and soothed her. To look in the face of a man, young, loving life and capable of enjoyment, bound by no profession to live more strictly than others, and be quite sure that no ill thought is there, is an uplifting thing, almost an education.

Grace's young deep eyes, raised in all reverence and a yearning that touched no earthly chord, absorbed the meaning of this face. It was outlined upon lemon branches starred with white blossom and yellow fruit, like that of a warrior saint on gold in some early altar-piece; leaf-filtered light made an aureole in the fair hair. Imagination sheathed the firm, square-shouldered figure in mail and set a plumed helm on the well-poised head, in the strong hand-clasp the cross-hilt of a two-handed sword: then all this vanished; in its stead came the red English tunic with sash and belt—the prosaic reality was a ragged flannel jumper —and lion-hilted sword, the tall Engineer busby with dolman, aigrette and chin-strap; the grave blue eyes looked out on a surge of turbaned dark faces and white-clothed figures. Black eyes glittered, a dark hand whirled a tulwar; it flashed as it fell. Westering sunbeams purpled through lemon boughs; the golden aureole turned crimson. Yet it was no angel, only a true and tender-hearted man, whose look had stirred unexpected depths of latent feeling, and made all base and ignoble things seem doubly vile.

She was sitting sideways, one arm on the back of a bench, level sun-rays filtered through leaves upon her upturned face, with its parted lips and questioning, wistful glance, like a praying child's.

'One blessing,' he repeated, 'is—coming—to this paradise. It is worth—losing the campaign—and much more to me.'

The whole earth and sky and sea were smiling in a broad rosy glory; she smiled back, still with that child-face.

'It *is* a blessing,' she replied; 'it is a paradise; it has made

Laura well—and you too. *How* ill you looked!' She had not noticed, and scarcely noticed now, that the Shadow and skeleton, so different from the seven-foot paladin they imagined, had given place to a healthy and fairly good-looking young soldier, being too deeply impressed by the spiritual and intellectual to dwell upon the physical in this daily seen companion.

'*Qui si sana*,' he said with a smile. Then, looking at the cross at her throat, 'And *that* heals. I was afraid—so glad you accepted the symbol—and wear it.'

'Do you mean the little cross? The symbol of what? Christianity? But how could it suit *me*?'

'The symbol of faith—patience, supreme love—of suffering, especially for others.'

She looked down and away over the purpled sea. The lemon bloom was sweet, the breeze brought it near.

'Ah!' she returned presently, 'I see; things I don't possess.'

'Come in to tea,' she added, starting up with one of those abrupt changes of mood that never failed to charm.

But she never forgot that Italian sunset, the sweet sea-breath and lemon-scents, the mosaic of leaf and blossom, the aureoled face, grave, sweet smile and deep voice, or the strong heart-throbs that they stirred.

CHAPTER XII

'WHY didn't you speak to her? Why didn't you take her away, Brin?' cried Sir Geoffrey, deeply moved.

'Take a girl away from her father? Make a scene and a scandal in a public place? My dear uncle, what next?'

'But didn't she *see* you? Didn't she speak to you, ask after'—he could not finish the sentence; the raised hand hid the quivering mouth.

'See? She saw nothing but the table, the numbers, the money piles and the croupier's rake. Everybody was talking of her. She was within an ace of breaking the bank. I never saw a face so degraded and distorted in my life. I should not have recognised her but for her father. Dorrien is not a man for whom I have a marked respect. But I must do him the justice to say that even he appeared shocked and distressed, and tried to take her away. She just shook him off, almost pushed him away. It's the taint in the blood. It *will* out.'

'Poor child, poor unfortunate child! What hope for her

while she has no better protector than her brute of a father? Never was a finer nature overthrown, Brinson. Such beauty and such intellect dragged in the dust, and a heart, oh! a heart of gold. If she would but have stopped with us! If I could but have persuaded her to leave them! What was Carrie doing? Absorbed in the younger girl? She seems never to have cared for Grace; Grace is a Harbord, the other a Dorrien. Why did I stay in Rome? If I had been at Monaco I might have done something; scene or no scene, I'd have had her out of that gambling hell. This luck is the devil's own lure. It's always so; the beginner always has this devil's luck, else there would be no gamblers. They pass the rest of their life in trying and hoping for that first run of luck that never returns. Gad, Brinson, the women are always the worst when they do go wrong. It took an archangel—the most beautiful in Heaven—to make a devil. Those hags at Homburg! I've seen them clawing their winnings. A male gambler is bad enough—but a woman. Once they lose ballast everything goes by the board. Grace, Grace gambling! The talk of the Riviera, of half Europe. You may be thankful for Pippin, Brin. He *can't* go wrong.'

Brinson had risen during this colloquy, with a haggard face and look as of physical pain; the old man's expression stabbed him; he could not support the sight of his quivering, drawn features. It was an agonised moment; his burden had become too heavy to bear.

'Even now,' continued Sir Geoffrey more calmly, but still with a shaking voice; 'it may not—may not—be too late. I'll ask her to come, Brin, to come on a long visit. I'll overlook all her unkindness, her ingratitude—rudeness; my letters unanswered, the Christmas present unacknowledged—everything—simply ignore it all, write as if nothing had happened, and say only "Come." When she came I would keep her. Anything—anything—to *save* her!'

'Ah!' sighed Brinson, still unobserved by Sir Geoffrey. He was standing up by the mantelpiece behind him, looking with knitted brows and flaming glance on the agitated face and grey head bowed over the hands stayed on the knees, as the old man sat, leaning forward a little and gazing straight before him. 'Would you do—that? Hardly, would you?' he added with hesitation.

'Why not?' the old man growled, suddenly turning and directing his blazing eyes upon his nephew's startled face. 'Who could prevent me?'

'Who indeed? But would you—*like*—to prostrate yourself—to renounce—ah!—dignity—ah! self-respect?'

'I should like,' thundered Sir Geoffrey, with a savage glance; 'I should like to fling you into a horse-pond; you——'

'Let me ask you to calm yourself,' returned Brinson, with a cold voice and steely eyes; 'you are scarcely aware of your own words; you forget yourself.'

'I'm aware that I'm damned if I'll be dictated to by anybody in this house or any other.'

'Many pardons. I understood you to ask my advice. I regret having given it. You would doubtless prefer to be alone,' moving slowly away, with a slight bow and a hurt look.

'Nonsense, nonsense, don't be so confoundedly touchy, Brin.'

'My nature,' returned Brinson, pausing and speaking as if with difficulty, 'is a sensitive one; my position——' his voice failed.

'Humbug and fiddle-faddle! Your position is the best in the county. What were we talking about? Monaco? Dover there too, and she didn't see Dover? Well! well! well! Where are the Dorriens now? Belwood is let, I know. I'll write to Grace to-night.'

'My cousin's present address,' he replied in a neutral voice, 'is—I have it in my book; I'll go and get it—not far from Hyde Park; they are in apartments.'

'Don't disturb yourself; any time will do. Or perhaps you will fill up the address for me. Halloa! what's the matter now, Pippin?'

The boy's voice had been heard singing the old lament—

'Far, far, in fairy land,
A fairy I was born'——

in the distance; he now entered, still singing, started at sight of his father, recovered at sight of Sir Geoffrey, whom he approached; then, pressing his cheek against his great-uncle's shoulder, sighed into silence and peace.

Brinson left the room and went to his study, where he found the locked post-bag of the latest delivery; this he unlocked, opened, and looked through with dexterous rapidity, seizing those letters he wanted. Among them were letters addressed to his uncle, one of which he opened without tearing the cover, read, and resealed; another, having read it with a singular smile, he held over a lighted taper till it was ash; the remainder he had thrown into an open tray placed for the purpose, and presently

fetched and distributed by a servant. Having written a couple of letters later on, he took them to a post-box—of which there were two at Hardwin—in the principal hall, a box to which only two people had a key, the letter-carrier and Mr. Hythe-Harbord. The second box was near Sir Geoffrey's study.

After Grace's singular run of luck, which all but broke the bank at the new Casino, and of which everybody but the family at Villa Bellosguardo was talking, Colonel Dorrien proposed a move, which was quickly effected, first to Belaggio, then to Switzerland, a delightful journey in those days. Mountain passes were climbed in a natural way, so that the meaning of the Alps penetrated the travellers' minds; they felt the distance between Italy and Switzerland, the character of the Italian plains and hills, of the warm southern slopes and spurs, and the difference from the northern side; in short, they travelled. In these days of funicular railways, Alpine tunnels and mountain railroads with clinging wheels, people go by parcel post in the dark, defiling and desecrating Nature's holiest places. The Shadow asked and received permission to accompany them.

It was beautiful and pleasant to abide by the Swiss lakes and delight in the spring glory of Swiss pastures and orchards, all bloom and verdure, deep and rich. There was lingering here and making rounds there, and wondering at then untrodden peaks and steeps, now reckoned commonplace climbing. Switzerland tasted and enjoyed, the Rhine was a joy and inspiration. Italian poetry was deserted for German legend, Volkslieder and history; such pleasant lingering there was along the haunted river that May was ending by the time they reached home, where Hilton had friends to visit before his return to India.

Colonel Dorrien was far too practical a man not to have pocketed his daughter's winnings when, in her agitation, she left them; he was also, though it cost him a pang, honourable enough to acquiesce in her passionate desire not to use them. They were therefore dispersed in various charities.

Two hearts were heavy when the white English cliffs came in sight; one of them was Grace Dorrien's. Never, never could the blissful experience, the easy untrammelled intercourse of those spring days be renewed. The next meeting would bring things to a climax. She would try to be a sister, but it would be bitter. If she had had any doubt of the nature of Mark Hilton's feeling, it was now removed. Laura had scarcely moved without his help; her every need and wish had been anticipated; he had read to her, showed her this, told her that,

carried her cushions, sketch-books, shawls, sometimes Laura herself; persuaded her to make excursions apparently beyond her, by this and that arrangement for her; his eyes were ever upon her delicate face, with an expression that woke wild pain in Grace—singular anguish, like nothing ever felt or imagined before. Laura was so happy; but her happiness pierced to the heart the sister who would have died for her a few weeks since. Grace thought of it in wakeful nights, felt it with passion too deep for thought, and wondered at her own bitterness, as healthy people wonder at the misery of disease when it surprises them. To grudge Laura her happiness, her low, contented laughter, her mirthful looks, her renewed health, her one deep draught of the wine of life! Yet next day the old torture would begin again.

Thinking of these things with quivering lip and clouded eye, she leant on the vessel's side and looked sadly at the faint cold gleam of English cliffs, when she felt, rather than heard, light firm steps that set her pulses beating. The footsteps stopped; she did not turn; one stood by her side, unseen, but felt in every fibre; she tried to think that this man was virtually her brother, her sister's lover, husband, her own—*friend*; nothing more; but everything within her revolted against the thought.

'Home-like,' the well-known voice said; 'nothing like those good grey English cliffs.'

'Are you so glad to see them,' she asked, almost with reproach; 'when they end such—a pleasant tour?'

'Still England is England, and after so many years abroad. Besides,' he added, his voice softening, 'it will not be good-bye, only "*Auf Wiedersehn!*" A lovely word. Your father says you will all be in town for weeks; I shall often be running up from the country, so that will be a pleasure for me. India is not a bad climate for consumptives. Of course it is a bitter banishment. I may be there a good many years. One cannot tell. My furlough will expire in the autumn. India is where promotion is most probable. The Mutiny has cleared the air for many a day. The hills are very beautiful, and pleasant, and healthy.'

'An interesting country, no doubt, whatever the climate.'

'The climate isn't so bad, if people live accordingly. Imagine what it would be if Hindoos insisted on living and dressing in England as they do in India. The young fellows who come out drink bitter beer, port, and brandy, and eat heating animal food, and all in excess; when they drop, the climate is blamed. It is really a very good climate when properly treated.'

'Like everything else. Even I am sometimes good when people treat me well, Captain Hilton. Look at those porpoises! How amusing they are! I wonder if they are happy?'

'I hope so. It is my faith that all life rejoices. Ah!—Miss Dorrien—you—will you remember our Italian lessons?'

Her heart throbbed with something that was more fear than hope. She looked steadily at the waves dancing along by the vessel's side in the sunlight, and replied that she hoped she was not so ungrateful as not to do that.

'The gratitude is on my side,' he returned. 'It was the most delightful experience in my whole life.'

The waves danced deliriously, their quick furrows fell away in a haste that made her giddy. He saw the warm crimson rush over her face with an answering flush; she dared not look up. Sunny foam-crests curled and broke from pale green-blue ridges, the cliffs became whiter and more distinct, the engine's throb-throb quickened to a mad haste; why must envious Time always speed moments we would fain keep? Colonel Dorrien, pacing the deck, paused and looked between the two heads, his field-glasses to his eyes.

'We shall touch Dover pier in ten minutes, Jack,' he said, continuing his course.

'But not the hearts of the custom-house people, daddy. Nothing under a gunpowder blast could do that.'

'And then—*Auf Wiedersehn!* But you will not—quite forget—Mark Hilton?'

'Not quite'—very carelessly—'I've one solitary virtue, I'm grateful.'

'By 'r leave, by 'r leave!' cried a sailor; they stepped back to make room for an uncoiling cable and found themselves involved in the bustle of collecting packages and making ready to land.

Colonel Dorrien got into a smoking-carriage when they were all settled, Captain Hilton receiving orders to take command of the party to London, which he did most effectively, providing them with strawberries, roses, papers, and other necessaries. Presently Laura dozed, Mrs. Dorrien was absorbed in the *Saturday Review*, Captain Hilton in the *Times*, Grace seemed immersed in a novel, when she suddenly broke silence with—

'Will she recognise you?'

Mrs. Dorrien looked up in surprise, about to ask who was referred to, when Captain Hilton tranquilly replied—

'I am sure she will. We exchanged pen-portraits.'

Grace looked out of the window; the train put on a spurt;

fields and hedges, hills and houses, station after station rushed by with growing speed; it slackened and they slowed into a station.

Mrs. Dorrien's eyes were on her paper; Colonel Dorrien's handsome face appeared at the window, his voice boomed through clinking hammers, porters' shouts, and paper-boys' cries, asking admission for the remainder of the journey.

'Wouldn't *you* like a cigar, Hilton?' he asked.

'Not in the least; I hate smoking in trains,' was the hasty rejoinder, added to an earnest admonition to Miss Laura to think of something she might want during the ten minutes' stoppage.

'A chip out of the moon, Laurie?' her sister suggested, 'or a message to the Flying Dutchman? Do say something out of pure charity to Captain Hilton.'

'Something to sweeten Jack's tongue,' Laura returned, and Captain Hilton observed that the peculiar charm of fruit was the blending of acid with sweet.

'Nothing like a good salt olive to bring the full flavour from wine,' Colonel Dorrien added, and in a cruelly short space they thundered into the great echoing terminus, and the prose of life seemed to roll heavily back over everything, like a tall, slow-gathering wave that levels and extinguishes all.

'Good-bye Disenchantment, good-bye Shadow; we shall want you in this hot weather,' was heard, as Laura's sunny head peeped from the cab in which she sat with her mother and Mursell; Grace and her father following in another.

When they were driving away in their old-fashioned growler, Grace turned and saw the Shadow standing like a statue on the platform, then, with a sudden impulse, she kissed her hand with a subtly sweet, seldom-seen flash of the eyes, and was gone.

'*Auf Wiedersehn!*' he said to himself, as he turned, and '*Auf Wiedersehn!*' she thought, as they rumbled away to their hotel.

Poor people cannot ride, except on other people's horses; Grace could ride anything able to carry her weight; fewer ladies rode in those days than in these; it was scarcely possible to ride in the Lady's Mile without attracting attention and becoming known. Women looked better comparatively on horseback in those days than in these, because the contrast between the neat hat and close-fitting habit, and the bulging atrocity of crinoline and amorphous upper garments, was greater; there was all the difference between a moving cage covered with flimsy stuffs of discordant colours and a human being neatly and almost suitably clad. Even the dangerous, long, full habits of the Fifties gave a graceful sweep to a lady rider's

appearance. To ride was therefore to reveal the utmost beauty and grace of which women were capable, except in their baths.

Miss Grace Dorrien was seldom in want of a mount when in town. She could break bad habits, conquer vices, show off every good point, and manage the unmanageable. She would fight with jibbers and buckers in the early mornings and ride them later; she had plenty of friends to ride with her; her father was proud of her horsemanship, her mother not averse to it; she was the admiration of the Row. But envy dogs the progress of fame and success; people were not wanting to say things of her. When people say things of others, they are usually nasty things—at all events, it was so in the fifties; no doubt in these late enlightened nineties we only speak of our friends to proclaim their virtues and indicate their charms. The things people said of poor Jack Dorrien were extremely nasty.

One bright June day Mark Hilton was leaning on the rails, admiring the stream of wealthy and aristocratic humanity, when his vision was blessed by the apparition of Miss Grace Dorrien, on a beautiful bright bay with fiery nostrils and impatiently arched neck, dancing and trying to get his head. What nerve and skill in the slim hand, so light yet so firm, curbing the proud creature, what grace in the slender, elastic figure, yielding to every motion of the horse, what brilliance of life and thought in the face that flashed at sight of him with a smile and bow, when, as by an afterthought, she bore towards the railing and reined in the dancing bay.

'How are you? and how long are you in town? and when may I tell them to expect you?'

'I was hoping to call between five and six,' with mutual 'Till thens,' was all that passed before the bay bounded on to rejoin the party. Then Captain Hilton, being alone in the crowd, heard things said of the bay's rider, and did not like them. He liked them so little that he found it necessary to mention them to Colonel Dorrien, thereby incurring his great anger, and risking his continued admission to the Dorrien circle.

'Tongues will wag, and who escapes?' Colonel Dorrien asked angrily.

'Miss Dorrien is not like others,' he ventured to reply; 'her beauty is so marked, of such distinction; she is in every way so brilliant—that—in short, you ought to know.'

'You mean well. Thanks, I'll be on the alert,' the father replied. War being thus averted, the two dined together in the presence of the unconscious cause of hostilities, whose conscience

was absolutely void of offence for almost the first time in her life—her social conscience, that is to say. It was not difficult for young women to transgress upon the arbitrary code of a prudish epoch, when to choose a hansom instead of a four-wheeler was to be fast, and to smoke scarcely heard of. Still it was singular that so much smoke arose from so very little fire, and that the epithet—pretty horsebreaker—was so persistently buzzed about, and even printed in the gossip papers that preceded the *World*, wherein, instead of the name and title, such flimsy veils as—'the lovely and accomplished relative of a well-known north-country baronet,' or 'of a gallant ex-officer of an exclusive cavalry regiment, residing not a hundred miles from the town of B——,' were used.

Hearing it all later, Grace understood, and accounted for all. But at this time she could not understand why her riding was suddenly forbidden, or why some of her friends suddenly became so short-sighted as to be unable to recognise her when they met, while others displayed sudden and equally unaccountable desire for her company, especially in public.

The Duchess of Ormonde, for instance. That lady, having consented to leave cards on the Dorriens at the earnest desire of her son, thought an act so gracious exonerated her from all further recognition of their existence. The young duke, hopelessly smitten at the Hardwin dance, had since that occasion received from Miss Dorrien what the Germans delicately call a basket—Heaven knows why—without being wholly discouraged or cured. Grace's astonishment was therefore great when the family received cards for an exclusive crush at the ducal mansion, still greater, when she was taken for a drive in the Park by the duchess herself, who called for her personally, and made a point of talking to her in the sight of the gay and shining spectacle given free to the public on June afternoons—less crowded by far in those days, less splendid on the whole, but offering individual equipages of greater magnificence and cost. All London was there; all London—that is, all in London worth knowing or thinking about—saw Grace Dorrien, sitting by the Duchess of Ormonde's side in a Parisian bonnet and gown, opposite a fascinated and well-contented duke.

'I hope it won't raise false hopes, Laura,' Grace said on her return. 'Poor boy! I can't think why mother made such a point of my going. I don't think she really wants me to have him; she is far above wanting a worldly marriage for either of us. Not that I should much object to being a duchess, if somebody—else were the duke.'

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG the friends suddenly visited with short-sightedness that prevented them from recognising Grace Dorrien at this time, was her own grandfather. Sir Geoffrey was less and less frequently in town with advancing years; he only came now for urgent business; but when he came, he liked London to be inhabited, maintaining that an empty city is the most gloomy place on earth. He also liked to look about him, to see and be seen; thus it came to pass that he enjoyed the opportunity of seeing the prettiest girl in London on a horse worth his weight in guineas, and ignoring her bow before the assembled actors in the great London show.

'That 's my grandfather,' Miss Dorrien said to her companion; 'his sight is failing. I must scold him for not looking hard enough.'

She did it that evening, thus:—

'DEAR GRANNIE,—You passed me in the Row to-day, but didn't see me. May I come and see you? I had not heard of your being in town before. Charmed to see you looking so well.—Your most affectionate granddaughter, GRACE HARBORD DORRIEN.'

Great was her joy at receiving an answer next morning in her grandfather's handwriting.

'At last,' she cried, 'dear old man! I knew it was all right; and so it is.' Greater than her joy was her sorrow on reading this:—

'MADAM,—I duly received your impertinent letter, which I perused with the deepest surprise and indignation. I request that you will forbear to attempt any further communication with me. The day will no doubt dawn in which you will rue your evil behaviour and bitterly deplore your shameful ingratitude, as well as your shameless levity of conduct. That one so young should be so old in ill-doing is indeed a melancholy proof of human depravity.—I have the honour to be, Madam, your obedient servant, GEOFFREY HARBORD.'

Her mother would not condescend to ask what was the tenor of this letter, or betray the faintest interest in it. But she saw the joyous flush on her daughter's face at sight of the letter, which was brought in during the family breakfast, also the spasm of pain and amazement that passed over her during its perusal, saw her lip quiver, and mortal pallor possess her countenance;

and, for the first time in her life, she was inclined to side with her child against her father.

'Why, Jack,' cried her father, 'I 'm afraid you 've had a nasty one. Never mind, old boy. Times will turn.'

'You are not as clever as you thought, Miss Jack,' Laura commented. 'What Cousin Brinson said was true after all.'

Grace, scarcely hearing, looked straight before her, with eyes dimmed by extreme pain, and thought and thought—amongst other things she thought of Monaco, and wondered if that had come to Brinson's ears and been carried, distorted and enlarged, to her grandfather. Mrs. Dorrien looked on with extreme concern, mixed with despair of Grace, as one who had wrought her own destruction, and rebuked Laura for her unsympathetic comment. When they rose from table, Grace took her mother aside to tell her that her grandfather had formally cast her off, owing, apparently, to some calumnies heard of her.

'But, indeed,' she added, 'I had done nothing between Christmas and Monaco. And since that I 've not been in one scrape—not one smallest scrape.'

'My dear Grace, I knew your grandfather long before you were born,' her mother replied; 'it is a subject on which the less said the better. I am glad to observe that you are learning to conduct yourself with some degree of propriety. But you must not be surprised if the consequences of your old follies follow you. It is easy to earn a bad name, not easy to lose it.'

Her father was even more perturbed than her mother on hearing this misfortune.

'The fact is,' he said, 'you are too good-looking, my dear. It doesn't do for a girl without a penny to be too good-looking. Besides, it 's the kind of good looks. The little 'un is as pretty a girl as I know, but such a quiet style. But you can't be hidden. With your dash and go and height and colour, why—it 's noticed a mile off; it strikes the eye. It 's a misfortune. Remember, my dear, that a girl of your appearance has to be much more careful than—I won't say a plain one, but one like little Laura, for instance. You see—h'm, ah—she doesn't challenge attention. I wish to goodness you hadn't such a rackety old father. I have not taken proper care of you. I let you have your head when I ought to have held you in. And you 've been a handful, Jack—a deuce of a handful, my dear.'

'But, Daddy, I 'm good now, I am indeed. I 've not been in disgrace—except that one afternoon—since the pink topaz neckface. I was younger then, Daddy dear,' she sobbed. 'Oh, this

is Brinson's work. He spies upon us and dogs us wherever we go. When there is anything to take hold of, he magnifies and distorts it, and poor dear Grannie believes every word he says.

'Well, the long and the short of it is that—*I* must turn over a new leaf; I must look after you more. You must never ride without me till we can have our own horses again—it won't be long now—and then I'll never touch a card again, Jack dear, never.'

'Oh, Dad! how often have you said that? It wasn't cards at Monaco.'

'I'll stick to it this time—I'll never touch a card again. And I'll have nothing to do with books or bookmakers. Give up all the meetings.'

'Bookmakers?' exclaimed his daughter, under the impression that devotion to literature and literary people was not amongst the foibles of her sire. 'Meetings?'

'Except perhaps the May meetings,' he added, 'and Goodwood and Ascot. Hard to give them up. But no more books for me. A friendly sweepstake or so, or a little playful backing of favourites. And I don't think a little old fogey whist at shilling points would be amiss. But I'll keep off the turf, give up books, and go to no more meetings. I'm not so young as I was, Jack. Time to be domestic at fifty odd,' he added, with a pious melancholy affecting to see. 'I'm not mercenary, Grace, nor a tuft-hunter; but it isn't every girl that has the chance of marrying a duke—and a steady one, mind you. It would set us all on our legs again.'

'No go, Dad; don't think of it. I couldn't stand his Grace, indeed.'

'Try; think it over,' he urged, encouraged by the red rush of colour at the first allusion. 'A double wedding; Hilton and the little 'un, his Grace and my Grace, bevies of bridesmaids, bishops, and bell-ringing. It would be a stunning finale to the season. The end crowns all. Hilton goes out in the autumn, the climate would suit Laura, and the strawberry leaves wouldn't be amiss for you.'

'Drop it, Daddy. If you set your heart on a coronet, you will be disappointed. *He* knows it; I have held out no false hopes indeed. My flirting days are over. I shall never wear a coronet or crown of any kind, you will see,' she added, leaving the room hurriedly, throwing a laughing glance behind.

'Jove,' said her father, 'what a duchess she would make!

Not a woman in the peerage could come near her. Beauty, wit, worth, and birth. Dorrien blood is blue, though I *am* a shady one. Harbord blood is blue. And to call her, *her*, my Grace, my pretty bright bird, a "pretty horsebreaker!"—in print too, the cowardly curs! I'm not sure that I ought not to thrash or shoot some of them, whatever they may say about making a scandal of it.'

So he repeated later to his wife, who implored him to do nothing of the kind.

'Once let an imputation rest on a girl,' she said, 'and it is never removed. It is always, "What was that story about So-and-so?" And no matter how innocent she may be proved, the mud sticks, the association is never forgotten. For Heaven's sake, Clarence, do nothing. The duchess has done what no one else could. Only let us ignore it, and be careful where she goes and what she does. She is daily becoming more discreet. She is clever and observant, and is gaining some knowledge of the world. We can but shield her and be careful.'

With all his faults and shortcomings, Clarence Dorrien had the deepest respect for the wife whom he wronged and made unhappy; he credited her with wisdom and knowledge of life; she had, in his opinion, made but one error of judgment—in marrying him, for which he sincerely pitied her. Therefore he yielded to her judgment and took her advice whenever it did not interfere with his pleasures. But it was hard—more than hard—to hear his child called a pretty horsebreaker, a name given at that time to the silk-attired scapegoat of civilised vice, who may not be even named in the ears of civilised vice, glaringly visible though she be in city and suburb, and well known by many an euphonious changing alias. But of this Grace Dorrien—happily for her—knew nothing, though she bitterly rued the consequences.

Mark Hilton saw the Dorriens two or three times in town, and more than once in Scarborough in August. Grace was wearing the filigree cross on the last occasion. He remembered long the gleam of sunshine upon it, and found himself wondering when he should see it again. When indeed, and where and how, he little dreamed; but he remembered when it came to pass. Blessed gift of blindness to the future! In September he went by the old overland route to India, hurriedly at the last, owing to arrangements depending on others, thus missing the farewell visit intended to the Dorriens. He alone was disappointed by this change of plan.

'Gone!' cried Grace, in a curiously strained voice, when the contents of his parting letter to Mrs. Dorrien were briefly summarised.

'What a shame!' Laura pouted; 'I really think the Shadow might have had the civility to call. Sisters indeed! Disenchantment is his proper name.'

'Well said, little 'un!' cried her father, who liked a girl of spirit. 'After all, what dismal things good-byes are! Hilton probably funked it—couldn't trust himself. Who blames him? She won't have to wear the willow,' he confided to Grace later; 'but, of course, he can't marry yet, as he told us.'

Grace made no reply; she held her hand over her heart, feeling as if the bitterness of something more than death were past. Disenchantment and shadow had entered her life. She knew the *Vita Nuova* almost by heart, laughed less, and thought more than in former days.

The Shadow, by this time half across Europe, and talking to his relations, was wondering, while he made cross-questions and crooked answers, at the change perceptible in Grace. It was something sad, almost tragic. What could it be? The family skeletons were old friends. Had she heard and appreciated the slander upon her name? How wicked, cruel, and cowardly such slanders are! Why could not the founder of this be hunted down and made to pay in the light for his dastardly blow in the dark? It would have fared ill with him in the hands of Mark Hilton; little mercy would he have received in that quarter. It was some man's doing. A woman wronged or scorned is malignant; but for pure, unscrupulous malignity, a man is needed. His hate is cold and continuous; it knows no weariness, no slackening, stops at nothing, is cruel as death, pitiless as the grave. A hating woman is a cubless tigress; a hating man, an unchained demon.

Mark Hilton had this advantage over the common run of men—he knew only good and average women, and men of various degrees, good and bad, some as vicious as society will tolerate, and that is very vicious. Society says to men, '*Fais ce que vouldras*,' but respect conventional honour; rob thy neighbour of everything but riches. 'Seem to be neither too evil nor too good; all else is forgiven.' Average man through all ages has known too much of depraved women, too little of average women. Hence world-old calumnies, hoary traditions of female spite and venom. But Mark Hilton could respect and honour womanhood. He who can respect women is not far from

respecting himself; he who respects himself can love and honour humanity, worship the divine and adore the ideal.

The Dorriens were at Belwood when the Shadow's farewell letter arrived. Their circumstances were for the moment easy; the place had greatly benefited by the year and a half's tenancy of a rich retired merchant, who had, Colonel Dorrien averred, imparted an air of 'beastly *bourgeois* comfort to everything. 'The place reeks with respectability,' he complained. He found it so dull after a short stay, solaced by partridges and pheasants, and so damp from the frequent water and tea drinking and absence of tobacco during the tenancy, that an instant flight to a German bath became necessary to combat rheumatic twinges, to which he was always liable in dull places.

The ladies remained at Belwood, talking much of the lost Shadow, who was to return to England in a year, a circumstance to which much importance was attached, since it was an open secret that he was to return in the character of an approved suitor.

'Engagements,' Mrs. Dorrien said in the presence of her daughters, 'should not lightly be made, still less marriages. Many an ebb and flow takes place in young people's fancy before the high tide of feeling sets in; it is well to pause and reflect and taste the savour of life before deciding its whole tenor.'

This saying, to the astonishment of her family, Miss Laura Dorrien interpreted as a large and liberal licence to flirt without losing demureness and propriety. Contemplation of coffins no longer charmed this young damsel; the vision of her own wax-white features, frozen in the pathos of death, bedewed by the tears of a mourning family, began to pall upon her; she now preferred that of her daily increasing charms in mirrors; she found it more amusing to adorn her living form with flowers in reality than the same with potential flowers in fancy; while the actual sufferings of subaltern officers, curates, and gilded male youth, from her living beauty were more pleasing to think of than the probable pangs of bereaved friends from the sight of her dead face. She pitied them all, and found pity an exquisite sensation. But all these bad things were done so discreetly and with looks of such angelic innocence, that the wrath of ruling powers was never drawn down on her sunny little head; and, as has already been shown, she retained sufficient consciousness of virtue to be able to rebuke her sister, whose 'native blackguardism,' as her father styled the amiable weaknesses of early youth, was too notorious to leave her any right to quell the exuberance of Laura's.

So, when the twenty-first birthday came round to Grace, and

found her, as has been seen already, in a desponding and melancholy, rather than a cheerful and thankful, frame of mind, little Miss Laura scolded her well.

'Ah, Laurie,' her sister replied, 'if you knew what I know, you would not be much more grateful than I am.'

'Ah, but what do you know?' Laura quickly asked. 'Jack dear, how unkind you are, always keeping things from me!'

'I know,' she replied slowly, putting a forefinger gently into a dimple in each of Laura's pink cheeks to emphasise her words, 'that—I—shall—die—an old maid—providing—I live long enough.'

But Laura knew that she meant something else.

They went into the breakfast-room, Grace thinking of what she knew—namely, the melancholy result of Colonel Dorrien's attempt to cure his rheumatism in the German manner. Her eyes were as observant as they were bright; she had been told nothing, but inferred much, from signs of tears on her mother's face, gloomy discontent on her father's, with other too familiar evidence that things were not as they should be.

The birthday wishes, mixed by her father with vague hints of his 'cursed luck,' and emphasised by her mother with unusual warmth, and an agitation quite unusual to that stately, often stern, woman, filled Grace with amazement. Had they detected her secret? Did they wish to salve the hidden wound? she wondered. 'I shall never pass another birthday at Hardwin till it is mine,' she said, recalling the last birthday.

'Yours!' cried her father. ''Pon my life, Jack, you're a cool hand.'

'Father dear, you ought not to have done this,' she said, opening a case containing a string of pearls, tears scalding her eyes at the thought that those pearls, in a Paris box, had probably much to do with the ill-omened visit to the Continent. 'It was a kind thought—but——'

'But it's hard lines not to be let give a coming-of-age present to an eldest child,' he added. 'For goodness' sake, no water-works, Jack! Why, what's come over the girl?'

'*I* shouldn't cry if mother had given *me* the sapphires,' murmured Laura, not without envy of the well-known jewels that had been Lady Grace Harbord's before her marriage, and Mrs. Dorrien's on her twenty-first birthday.

'I—I don't think I ought to have so many things,' Grace replied, winding the pearls round her throat, and looking

pensively in a mirror at the effect. 'I 'll wear them all to-night; they 'll go with white satin charmingly.'

'The Garenne sapphires were and are always for the eldest daughter, Laura,' their mother said. 'You will remember that, Grace, and hand them on.'

'And if I have no children, mother?'

'Then to Laura's, my dear. And if there are no daughters at all, back to the Garennes, not Harbords—certainly not to strangers.'

'Well, well, one can't come of age more than once. It seems about as lively and amusing as the Day of Judgment. What is to be the order of the day, Daddy? Pheasants? A walk round the farm? Billiards?'

It appeared that a good deal of business was to be transacted, and that Grace was at once to exercise her new legal rights by signing and witnessing documents.

'Where am I to write my name? My name isn't spinster. Do men put bachelor after their names? Why not? When one comes in to nothing, what can one have to sign?' were among the flippant, light-hearted comments with which Miss Dorrien accompanied a ceremony regarded by her parents with the utmost gravity; in the midst of which Mrs. Dorrien, with a pinched and haggard face, looked up and said tremulously, 'Are expectations nothing, Grace?'

'Less than nothing; that is, if they are pleasant.'

'Pray be serious and give your attention for once,' her mother returned in an agitated voice, while her father pished and pshawed and expatiated on feminine incapacity for business.

'There,' he exclaimed at last, taking the pen she had used and flinging it into a waste-paper basket, 'that nuisance is over! Let us go to the billiard-room. Is your hand firm, Grace?'

'Firm as a rock. But, mother! What is the matter?' she cried, turning as she was leaving the room and going back to her mother, who was white as death, and shaking like a reed.

'Touch of ague?' her husband asked, rather grimly. 'Cold fit? Glass of port?'

'It is nothing,' Mrs Dorrien replied, passing her handkerchief over her brow. 'Nothing,' she faltered.

The day was close and warm for the season, a damp, still October day. Grace paused, looking from the beckoning father to the shuddering mother, who asked to be left, saying she was better alone, a turn in the fresh air would restore her. Then the daughter, yielding to the filial instinct her mother so often

repelled, bent and softly kissed her; whereupon Mrs. Dorrien, averting her head, began to sob heavily, while her husband, gnawing his heavy moustache and looking darkly on the scene, called his daughter away.

'She'll be all right in a minute. Upset by birthdays, always was,' he explained. 'Women are so deuced soft-hearted; all the better for us.'

Yet Grace observed that her father could scarcely place his cue properly, so infected was he by the ague fit that had visited her mother; his strokes were wild and feeble; her own, firm enough, were badly aimed; it was a very poor game, and scarcely improved by the brandy and soda the worthy Colonel took to steady his nerves.

Half the county and a contingent of cavalry and infantry from adjacent barracks danced at Belwood on that evening. The Garenne sapphires flashed with less lustre than their wearer's eyes; she, to all appearance, was gay, as became the heroine of the evening. Every dance was conscientiously danced with proper partners, no favour shown, no flirtations. The gentle, blue eyes of Miss Laura were far more mischievous than her sister's dark orbs; her card was by no means strictly adhered to; distracted youths were more than once seen searching high and searching low for an absent, sylph-like form, discovered, if at all, too late, in some secluded nook, in serious emotional converse with a preceding partner, but with a face of angelic innocence and words of sad regret for unavoidable mistakes in the hieroglyphics representing partners on her programme. Laura was considered so good that she was not half chaperoned either by father or mother, who were continually preoccupied with anticipations of her sister's misdeeds. Great is the power of a good or a bad name; acquire the first, and *fay ce que vouldras*; the second, and you may not move a finger without scandal.

The band played as delightfully as military string bands can. Once they played a waltz, probably 'The Guards,' then in vogue. During the Dorriens' stay in town the Shadow had waltzed with Grace to that melody. A slight, undulating, yearning melody it was, entirely without distinction. A solid English squire was revolving to it with a tall girl in white satin, sapphires, and pearls. The solid squire vanished from the sight of those dark eyes, the Shadow's shadow filling his place. At the same moment, or as near it as geography and the use of the globes permitted, the Shadow himself was softly whistling the same air.

CHAPTER XIV

A WEEK later an entertainment similar to that once rehearsed at Hardwin was given to an audience of one in Miss Dorrien's sleeping apartment at Belwood Grange. A dull dinner party had occurred in the evening, consisting of what Colonel Dorrien termed the Heavy Brigade, the guests at which had all passed life's meridian without distinguishing themselves. Most unfortunately, Colonel Dorrien, who had been summoned unexpectedly to town in the morning, was unable to return by the evening, a telegraphic despatch to that effect arriving after the guests were assembled.

The word telegram at this date was still uncoined, the barbaric 'wire' unimagined; telegraphic communications were rare and expensive; to receive one was an event; women trembled and swooned at sight of the thin brown envelope; men looked grave; households were thrown into consternation. Trivial messages were not then flashed over the world by this august, newly-found Ariel; nor was language yet debased by the exigencies of compression. Therefore the guests knew that important, possibly tragic, events deprived them of their host. Yet Miss Dorrien was not only quite unruffled by the telegram, but strongly suspected it to be a fabrication on the part of her volatile parent, whom she knew to be intolerant of the deadly respectability of the Heavy Brigade.

The Brigade had passed a pleasant evening, well fed and well amused. They had listened to anecdotes of premiers, generals, bishops, and other celebrities, whom or whose intimate friends Miss Dorrien had met in society; anecdotes not entirely founded on fact; oddly enough, similar anecdotes had been told of other distinguished people a century or so before. After dinner they had heard classic music on harp and piano, and many light and gay songs and duets to a guitar. Whist had been attempted.

When the last carriage had rumbled away and chamber candlesticks been taken, a young lady, in evening dress of the period, cut low, straight across the shoulders, and adorned with a pendent curtain of lace styled a bertha, with very tight short sleeves and balloony flounced skirts of incredible circumference, carried upon a steel cage, now dropped—a slim figure with streaming dark hair, emergent from a sea of pale-pink drapery, was anticipating by some forty years the modern amusement of skirt-dancing, with

the addition of a wild impromptu chant, to the admiration and delight of a fair-haired damsel in diaphanous blue. Soon the infection took the latter, and, dropping her own cage[1] and stepping from it, she formed a blue convolvulus, gyrating opposite the pink one. To whom enter Jane Mursell, crying—

'Miss Greece,' to unheeding ears; then 'Miss Laura,' with similar results.

'I 'd be a butterfly,' sang the pink lady. 'Born in a bowah,' responded the blue one, letting her fair hair fly madly loose, and whirling with only less skill and rapidity than the pink, who was now an angel with double wings. Thereupon Mursell, becoming importunate, was seized and whirled, first by one, and then by the other, till she begged for mercy, and was dropped breathless on a sofa, the cushions of which lay about the room, where they had been hurled by the dancers at each other, with flowers, gloves, and handkerchiefs.

Then it was that the stately presence of Mrs. Dorrien, still fully dressed, was perceived by her eldest daughter, who at once ceased to be a butterfly, and approached her with a court curtsey, on rising gracefully from which, and looking her mother straight in the eyes, expecting a sharp rebuke, her own face changed, she smoothed back her wild hair, and falteringly asked, in a low voice—

'Mother! what *is* it?'

Mrs. Dorrien's face was pale and strange, her mouth twitched; the diamonds on her neck flashed with spasmodic, heaving breath; she could scarcely speak; there was a wild, piteous appeal in her eyes that went to her daughter's heart. Signing to Grace to follow, she left the room, and on reaching her own, shut the door and locked it, sinking on a sofa before the fire, and rocking to and fro as if in agony. Grace sat by her, passed her arm round her and waited, while the mother fought with her agitation, and then gasped out in a stifled shriek—

'Your father!'

It seemed to Grace that she had known it all long ago and was quite familiar with it, as an old, old tale; she drew closer to her mother, and gently stroked the white arm next her, thinking how well violet velvet became her; still she said nothing. Mrs. Dorrien sobbed in dry, heavy sobs, her head bowed, her pale mouth trembling. At last she said in a low, strained voice—

'What *shall* I do? I am—so—frightened.'

[1] Figures of the cage are to be found at the British Museum in the illuminated chronicles of *Punch*.

'Where is he?' came in Grace's musical lower notes.

'He must—have reached—Calais,' her mother gasped, gaining self-command as she spoke. 'It was—it was *cards*—club—at a —the—I don't remember which—they accused him——'

'No,' Grace moaned, white and sick, 'not true, no——'

'Accused him——' continued Mrs. Dorrien, unheeding the interruption. 'He challenged—the man.'

'Mother dear,' asked Grace, 'how can you possibly know this?'

'He challenged him two days ago; I saw the reply by accident. They had—oh, Grace—they had asked him to—resign. It was Major Blackwell who—said—told—Clarence of—of the—the marked card——' At the word her voice rose to a faint shriek—'I ought not to speak, I ought not—but I cannot—I *cannot*—bear it. We must keep it from—from Laura.—No one, no one knows—my brain—it is turning—dishonoured—Grace, Grace —Am I mad?'

'No, dear, no; you are upset, tired, fanciful,' she replied, trembling and white, and wondering why she was not mad herself. Yet it seemed an old story heard long ago, of dark forgotten pain. 'But the telegraphic despatch?' she asked gently after a while; 'what was that?'

'Clarence—promised—to let me know—if—if he was cleared. The word was to be—"Clear day, cannot return to-night." That meant that he would come to-morrow and all be well. But the message was—"Over the water, cannot return to-night." That means he will never be in England again—*alive*. And he thought that we should go abroad too. For the winter first—as last year. But to return no more. He left the message to be handed in at Dover and telegraphed *after* he—left England. That tells me it is Calais. Grace, what shall we do? What can we do?'

'Mother dear,' she said gently, 'you are very tired. Did you sleep well last night?'

'Sleep!' she cried, 'sleep with *that* upon me! Good Heavens! It is—now three nights—I have not slept since I heard it, not once. How could I?'

'You must,' her daughter said, placing her hand on her mother's burning brow. 'Mother, you *must* sleep, else you will go mad. We can do nothing unless you know of an address that would reach him.'

'I know nothing—nothing. But I fear—oh, I fear, that Blackwell is at Calais too.' She began to tremble convulsively. Grace soothed and caressed her, softly removing the jewels she wore.

'It will not be as bad as you think,' she said; 'it will all come right in time. But you must sleep now, and to-morrow we may have—a message.'

Mrs. Dorrien shuddered, knowing what the message might be, but she submitted to have her dress removed and her hair brushed, and consented to take a sleeping draught, prescribed and kept at hand for severe pain she had recently had. Grace stood behind her, carefully and gently brushing out the long, thick hair, confident in the mesmeric influence of the brush, and looking out of dark, deep eyes she did not recognise as her own in the mirror above Mrs. Dorrien's head, while she spoke in calm, even tones, and seeing a more restful expression steal over the pale, haggard face beneath the brush strokes.

'Does Mursell know?' she asked presently, in a voice that seemed to belong to some one else.

'She only suspects,' was the reply, interrupted by a stifled cry from Grace, whose eye was suddenly caught by the gleam of jewels on her own neck.

'The pearls, the birthday pearls,' she whispered, feeling each separate jewel on her throat burning into the flesh beneath it. Her mother looked up and saw them gleaming white on the satiny whiteness of the young neck in the glass; a hand was clutching them as if to tear them off.

'The pearls, ah! poor Clarence. Do not fear, Grace; nothing is wrong with *them*. He has many, so many, good qualities, my poor, poor husband. But we must go, go to him at once.'

'We will go together, you and I,' Grace replied, subduing the violent trembling that had seized her. 'But to-night you must sleep. To-morrow we will arrange all.'

'Mother is resting well, Mursie,' she said ten minutes later to the anxious, bewildered Mursell; 'I helped her to bed; she will sleep now. She was worried by my father's absence. There is trouble, Mursie dear. But no one must know. Don't try to know. Good-night. No, thank you, it is late, I will slip quickly to bed. I want nothing. Dear, dear old Mursie!'

Poor Jack Dorrien slept little that night. She took the pearls with a shudder from her neck and put them away out of sight, then sat, still as a stone, before her fire, always with the piteous, helpless appeal of her mother's face before her. Once she stole softly to her room and found her sleeping a heavy artificial sleep, then she returned to lie restless and tossing on her own bed. It seemed to her that nothing mattered now, or would or could matter ever any more, except to shelter and succour that poor broken mother

and innocent, unconscious Laura. Everything had come to an end with a sudden shock, too severe, too crushing, for pain. All feeling but that one deep, protecting instinct was numbed and still. Once, in a gleam from the watch-light she burnt in case her mother should wake and want her, she saw the pink dress thrown carelessly over a chair, upset in the mad merriment of a few hours since, and smiled to think that the young flushed Mœnad whirling in the exuberance of her fresh vitality had been —who? Not herself. She seemed to see the girls whirling in their wild gaiety as if they were strangers, with a faint wonder at their folly. Everything hoped or feared before seemed trivial and unimportant by the side of this deadly thing. Yet she was quite sure that she had foreseen it and gone through it all before in some strange pre-natal or dream rehearsal. Her brain was clear and acute; she decided what to do in every possible issue to what she had heard brokenly the night before. Finally, towards dawn, nature exacted her due, and she slept profoundly far into the bright morning.

All the next day was passed in tension of horrible suspense. Laura was sent off early with Mursell on a shopping excursion. Mrs. Dorrien, refreshed and calmed by her sleep, wandered aimlessly in and out of the house, sometimes studying trains and boats in *Bradshaw*, sometimes trying to read.

In the evening the bolt fell.

The telegram stated that Colonel Dorrien was ill at a certain hotel at Calais—nothing more. The name of the sender was unknown to the Dorriens.

'He is dead,' Mrs. Dorrien said in the dry accent of despair.

Twenty-four hours later the mother and daughter were standing by Colonel Dorrien's bedside, Laura being left at Belwood with Mursell. He was badly, fatally wounded, but alive and perfectly conscious, glad and touched to the heart to see them.

'Rubbish shot here,' he said with a quivering mouth and faint voice. 'Best so. No good to anybody. Never was. Jack, Jack, I 'm not *fit* to be kissed.'

All that Grace could say was, 'Oh! Daddy, Daddy, don't die!'

'I must die, my dear,' he said presently, when they were more tranquil. 'It 's the only creditable thing I ever did in my life—except marrying you, Carrie. Even that wasn't a straight thing, and I 've been a miserable husband to you.'

'Clarence, Clarence, my very own,' the poor woman sobbed, 'I might have made you happier. I ought to have had more patience.'

'Any amount would have come in handy, Carrie. Poor girl, you made a bad investment the day you married me. Poor girl!'

He was a good swordsman, but he had not chosen the weapons. Major Blackwell was a dead shot, but held it pure murder for two men to stand at measured distance and shoot each other dead in cold blood. With swords there is the skill of defence as well as attack, infinitely more play of manhood and courage, and less danger. Men may fight with swords; it is incredible that any but demons should fight with pistols. Those who witnessed the duel—they were three, two seconds and a doctor—said it was a fine sight, a noble display of science and strength. Colonel Dorrien drew first blood. Major Blackwell was French by his mother; this was not his first duel. Colonel Dorrien was satisfied, his honour was avenged, his adversary's blood had wiped out the insult: not so Major Blackwell, whose wound was slight and superficial. They were both fine, well-moulded men, about the same height and build, Blackwell many years the younger, and still on active service. His Gallic blood warmed with the fire of the clashing swords — Gallic and British blood make a deadly blend—blood was drawn on each side. Dorrien was now on the defensive, Blackwell the assailant; the older man's guard gradually became slower and less effective, till it was passed, and he fell. Blackwell, having asked pardon and shaken a limp, damp, apparently dying hand, fled, wondering, in the sudden cooling of his blood, why he had done it. So Cain probably wondered.

But of these things the mother and daughter heard nothing till later. The cause of the duel, they were then told, was a glass of wine dashed in a face.

Poor Dorrien had not thought they would come to him when he sent the message; he had only meant to break the shock. The vital flame flared up under the stimulus of this great joy, but sank all the more rapidly afterwards. It soon became apparent by the increasing pallor and sharpness of his face that his hours, nay, moments, were numbered.

'Clarence, shall we pray?' his wife asked, Grace being absent to get something for her father.

'Say first that you forgive me, Carrie. For three whole years I was faithful to you, I was indeed.'

'All is forgiven, dearest, all. But—but—Grace,' she faltered, just as the latter returned.

'Forgive me, Grace,' he murmured, in a diminishing voice. 'I meant to put it straight—I did indeed. I was desperate, my dear, *so* desperate. And now—too late.'

'There is nothing to forgive,' she replied, thinking he was wandering, and bending low to catch the ebbing voice.

'Signature——' he murmured more faintly. 'I meant—well, Dear Jack—lile lass.' The eyes closed, the voice died to the inarticulate murmurs of a wandering mind.

All was soon over; Clarence Dorrien's last card was played; he had run through his last fortune; the wife he had loved and wronged was a widow.

'A cardsharper,' Sir Geoffrey was saying at the moment. 'Poor Carrie! Well, she made her bed, and she must lie on it. And she deserves it. She had no pity on her poor, lonely father—no pity and no penitence. Nowhere now for her to hide her head. The only good news now would be the beast's death.'

The wind was roaring round Hardwin Hall, shuddering and shrieking among towers and battlements; every now and then a storm of rain and hail volleyed small shot upon the windows and hissed in the fires; it was a proper autumn night, when it is pleasant to sit by a blazing hearth and listen to warring winds outside, and be all the cosier for the contrast.

Sir Geoffrey was sitting up late in the library, chatting and listening to the storm, that was too loud for sleep. Brinson put a fresh pine-log on the fire; the flame licked the resinous drops upon it, and coiled lovingly round it, bringing out its sharp, wholesome fragrance. In a cosy, firelit room on the first floor, Pippin, roused by the storm, sat up in his bed, shivering, pale, and wild-eyed, and sang his homesick song—

'Far, far in fairyland,
A fairy I was born——'

in a voice rapidly cracking from boy's treble to manhood's deep tones. His mother never came to him in his night terrors now; she was seldom able to leave her room in the progress of her mysterious malady.

Sir Geoffrey looked into the burning coals silently and thoughtfully, his hands on his knees, his head a little forward, as if consulting some oracle. Brinson's sidelong glance was bent upon his massive face.

'D'ye think it's true, Brin?' he asked, suddenly turning his piercing gaze upon his nephew.

'Dover never repeats *canards*. And true or not, Dorrien is

turned out of his clubs. My only wonder is that any club would tolerate him. I suspect he was desperate, poor beggar! He should sell Belwood and live abroad.'

'Poor beggar! Unmitigated blackguard!' growled his father-in-law. 'If he's poor, it's his own doing. A beggar he always was—the brute!'

'We are none of us perfect. After all, Dorrien has good points, if scarcely a model husband,' Brinson urged in his gentle voice.

'Good points? Only at whist. You're one of those soft-hearted people who would even pray for the "puir deil," Brin.'

'It would seem only consonant with Christian charity, one fancies,' he returned, with his suave manner and fine smile. 'And so, good-night.'

A few days later the news of the death produced some perturbation at Hardwin. Brinson, seeing it suddenly in the *Times*, turned pale, and had to leave the room.

'What's the matter, Brinson? Ill?' asked Sir Geoffrey, who was at luncheon with the boys.

'Dorrien,' Brinson gasped in a strained voice as he rose from table, 'is—dead.'

'Dead? Dorrien dead? The deuce he is! Poor Carrie! Well, she's rid of the worst luck she ever had in her life,' her father observed with some excitement, stretching his hand for the paper that Reginald picked up and gave him. 'H'm! Calais! Well! Best thing he could do, make a clean bolt of it. Soft-hearted beggar, that Brin,' he muttered. 'Not a drop of gall in him.'

Mr. Hythe-Harbord, though overcome by his emotion, still looked out eagerly for the post-bag, which he opened within locked doors, and tremblingly searched. He found a black-edged letter with a French stamp in a handwriting he knew well. It was addressed to Sir Geoffrey, yet he thought proper to spare his uncle the trouble of opening, and the pain of perusing, it.

'MY DEAR FATHER,' it ran,—'I have sinned against you. Pray, pray, forgive me; for I am indeed heavily stricken. Often as you have refused me pardon, I think you must now have some pity. Long ago I lost my beloved and only son, as you know. I have had other heavy sorrows—not the least of which was and is your long-continued anger and estrangement. My dear cousin, who has so often interceded for me, will tell you how bitterly I have repented. I know that he has, as I have desired from time to time, done so. And now, my dear, dear father, pity me, I beseech you, for he whom I loved, and for whose beloved sake I

forgot my duty to my father, has been suddenly torn from me by a violent death. His honour had been assailed; he thought it right to demand satisfaction of his assailant. They fought here at Calais with swords, and my beloved husband fell, mortally wounded. This, of course, is not to be known except to you, who have the right to know all that concerns me and mine. One word, I beseech you, dear father, one little word of kindness, of pity, of sympathy, lest I go mad. My poor children are left to me; they are good girls, but a father's anger is a bitter curse. I could not undo what I did. By the Father of all, I implore you to forgive, as you would be forgiven.—Your devoted, broken-hearted child, CAROLINE.'

A violent trembling seized Brinson as he read, his teeth chattered, his face was distorted, he held on to the table at which he sat with both hands. Presently he drank some water, controlled himself, and read the letter again, his face hardening, and cruel lines tightening his mouth as he read. Satan is a hard master; he allows no turning back; he exacts his pound of flesh to the finest fraction of an ounce. His miserable slaves, shuddering and revolting, are scourged pitilessly on. Brinson tore the letter in small pieces and burnt it. A second short letter was addressed to himself thus:—

'MY DEAR BRINSON,—My father will give you particulars; I will only tell you that I am a widow. Of *your* sympathy I am secure. C. DORRIEN.'

The knocking at his study door, scarcely observed in the agitation of reading the letter, now became so urgent that he rose and opened it sharply with an angry exclamation, silenced by the sight of Sir Geoffrey, who at once entered without waiting for permission.

'Gad! Brinson,' he exclaimed, 'you frightened me. I thought you must be ill, insensible perhaps.'

'Just a swoon, nothing more,' he replied faintly; 'I'm all right now. Yes, I *was* a little upset.'

'Why did you lock the door?' his uncle asked in a tone of deep concern. 'You were feeling so unwell that you had to leave the room, and then you must lock yourself in. Never do that again, Brinson. It's not fair to your friends. Pray take some wine or something. All right again? Well, you gave me a deuce of a fright. I wanted to see the letters; they said you had them; and here I've been knocking this ten minutes.'

'Yes,' Brinson replied, 'I had just unlocked the bag and—knowing something—ah—painful might be in it—locked myself in secure from intrusion, when this faintness overcame me. I 'm rather run down; must have a tonic. Sorry I kept you waiting.'

'Well, what does she say?' Sir Geoffrey asked, bending over the letter heap on the table and turning over the packets, with an upward glance at the black-bordered paper still in Brinson's hand, the cover of which lay, address upwards, on the table.

'Very little,' he replied, crushing the note in one hand, and then drawing it tightly through the other again and again, as if in thoughtful unconsciousness of the action. 'The bare fact, Forlorn widow. Duel with swords, not even a date.'

'I thought——' Sir Geoffrey faltered in a quavering voice, 'there might have been *something*—at last—for me. The—the poor beggar being gone—she might—well, she *might* have written. And then—the cause of quarrel being removed—I wonder if there *is* a letter,' he added, choking back something that impeded speech, as he turned the letters over and over with wistful eagerness, neglecting to take several addressed to himself, and averting his face to conceal the disappointed eyes and shaking mouth.

'She 'll never write now—never,' he said a few seconds later, with a quiet despair too deep for passion. Then he turned to Brinson at a stifled sound to find him crying, his face buried in his hands. Sir Geoffrey had no tears; he looked without emotion upon his nephew's agitation, turned away and left the room.

Soon after, the house was shaken by a tumult of organ music, a deep, rhythmic boom without melody, that broke and fell, rose and broke again, like a heavy surge of sea on a rocky shore. It filled many rooms and rolled in mighty volume through the grand dining-hall, where Demeter still vainly sought lost Persephone, and where the portrait of Lady Grace seemed to tremble as the music thrilled the canvas. Then there rose a sullen roar, as of thunder gradually gathering strength and rattling among mountain crags with repeated boom; the quick roll of drums followed, then silence.

Brinson needed not to be told whose hand was upon the manuals and whose foot on the pedals; nor did Pippin, who flew light-footed from corridor to corridor, and stood statue-still with eager face by the organ, ready to draw out the stops. Sir Geoffrey's massive head, held erect still, was like granite, his strong hands once more pressed the manual, and the heart-shaking chords of the 'Dead March in Saul' boomed slowly and solemnly

out, in restrained strenuous passion, with a wail of unutterable anguish on flute-stop and *vox humana*. Then the great voice of the trumpet stop pealed out in melodious agony through the house and died away, and so the music rolled on, from change to change, passion to passion.

The intolerable agony of the great dirge shook Brinson to his centre; he rose and fled from stair to stair and room to room, pursued by the thunder-roll and trumpet-wail of the tempestuous music evoked by Sir Geoffrey and Pippin, until he reached a region of silence, troubled scarcely by a far-off surge at the opening of a distant door. He wanted air, and stepped out on a balcony having a view of the great central tower. There he breathed in great gasps, till silence and sounds of cawing rooks and broken murmurs floating up from time to time calmed him, else he must have thrown himself from the balcony and made an end of his misery under a nerve excitement beyond his strength.

Presently, raising his eyes to the blue heaven, he saw the flag on the top turret floating at half-mast.

'What is that for?' he called to the man who had just lowered it, and was visible coming down at the same level, through an open window.

'By Sir Geoffrey's order, sir,' the man called back, 'for his son-in-law, Colonel Dorrien.'

But neither the solemn thunder of the 'Dead March' nor the flag drooped at half-mast were entirely for Colonel Dorrien; they helped to express a sorrow beyond speech—that for the lost darling, of whom Sir Geoffrey never allowed himself to speak, his grandchild.

END OF PART I

PART II

'For to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.'

CHAPTER I

An April morning some six months after Colonel Dorrien's death saw a carriage pursuing its solitary way over a lonely chalk road on the ridge of the downs towards Barling, the little old town that nestled beneath their shelter. The Wotton arms were on harness and panels, the Wotton liveries on the servants; the three ladies in the open landau were in deep mourning.

The pure, delicious down air had a vitalising sparkle; the glamour of the loveliest of months was everywhere—in a mysterious pale sky piled with breaking masses of cumulus cloud tinged with changing opal; in soft sun flushes passing with sudden glory over coppice and hedgerow like smiles on a human face, and bringing out vivid fleeting hues on green slopes, on dark fallows powdered with springing corn, on red-roofed homesteads, corn-stacks, and village towers, on the blue line of sea to which a fertile plain dotted with farm and hamlet, flock and herd, rolled between downs and broken hills, their flanks purpling with aerial shadow; in the madder and more varied music of breeze-hung larks; in the dance of half-blown cowslips on thymy bank, meadow, and down-sward; in dainty wind-flowers floating in hazel-copse above masses of white violet and thick carpets of primrose; in the sweet promise of sheaves of bursting green on lower beech boughs, in wood-spurge and wood-ruffe, in wild cherry-bloom and budded crab-apple; in newly-come swallows and the call of gay cuckoos.

As their wheels rumbled over the smooth, hard road, sheep scattered to right and left, with tinkle of bell and plaintive baa of ewe to lamb; rabbits scuttled away into copse or gorse bush just bursting into golden bloom; men strode along furrows on tilled slopes, scattering spring seed into the warm and fragrant earth; harrows clinked along behind slow teams; blue spires of smoke

coiled above solitary thatched cottages and red-roofed farms; white sails skimmed distant sea-bloom; other sign of humanity there was none for miles on the Queen's highway that climbed and dipped and wound along the down crest, like a scroll of brilliant white.

'That must be Barling,' Laura cried, seeing a church spire beneath them. But they passed the road that dipped down towards it, and climbed higher, having sea now on either hand and glorious solitude vocal with many bird-voices. Thence they declined into a lane overhung by straggling hedge-banks —tangled with clematis, honeysuckle, briony and rose, with tall cowslips nodding in the long grass beneath. What was that balmy aroma, familiar yet forgotten? The scent of clover surely, fresher with each year's forgetfulness, sweeter with each year's remembrance.

The carriage must stop at the foot of the hill, the girls must walk to the summit, breathing the sweet sea-breath, breaking boughs of sloe-blossom, and discovering fresh and ever-fresh glimpses of sea-bounded landscape.

'There is something really fascinating in going to live in a place one has never seen,' Grace was saying to her sister, as they bounded up the hill-steep.

'If it were habitable,' Laura replied, 'Barling is not. We shall be buried alive, chained within walking distances. The first winter will kill me.'

'Winter is behind us. I 'm glad we are facing it in the spring, Laurie. And who knows what may happen in the meantime?'

When the widow and orphan brought home their dead from over sea for burial, they had the pain of finding bailiffs in the house. Long-suffering creditors, attracted like crows to seed fields, rushed in and pressed for payment at the sinister rumours of Colonel Dorrien's difficulties; and when his affairs came to be investigated and wound up, sad revelations were made. Belwood had to be sold; the last acre of land, the last penny of all Clarence Dorrien's inherited and acquired possessions, was gone, and his debts not cleared.

The day after the funeral, Lord Wotton, who had flown to Calais to help his cousins in their trouble, and remained with them at their service, came out of the library after a long morning with the family lawyer, and old family friend, Mr. Humphry Dolliver, of Dolliver and Bradley, and asked Grace, who was walking in the pleasaunce, to come in and talk over affairs with him

'It's no use to blink the matter,' he said, when they were seated at a long table piled with documents and tin cases, 'you are brave, Grace, and have understanding. The plain truth is that your poor father was not only ruined, but in debt, when he died.'

'I am not surprised, Wotton,' she replied; 'he—he said—that his affairs were desperate, poor dear.'

'But how,' he continued, 'you could do a thing so mad as this, I am at a loss to understand.'

'As what?' she asked, surprised and off her guard.

His hand was on a parchment that her quick eye soon recognised; he looked at her with a glance that perturbed, almost startled, her.

'Dear Grace,' he said, 'you were but just of age. Could you have understood what you were doing?'

It would have taken much to startle or trouble the poor child in the crushing sorrows that lay upon her; yet she trembled with an inward shudder that it took all her strength to subdue and conceal.

'Why do you speak in that manner?' she returned slowly and haughtily at last. 'How should I not understand? I signed this——' taking it from the table where it lay under his hand, and trying to catch the gist of it from the maze of engrossed subtleties and intricacies, with its perpetual flourishing large '*Whereas's* and *Hereby's*,' interminable sentences, bewildering repetitions, cumbrous phrase and involved manner. 'I signed it on my birthday, as you perceive. Is it not properly signed and witnessed? Is there anything to invalidate it?'

'No such luck,' he replied, as sadly certain of her absolute ignorance of what she had done, as of her fine effort to shield the dead and honour the dishonoured. 'It is only too valid, dear Grace. But it seemed at first impossible to think that you knew you were depriving yourself of your half of the reversion to Mrs. Dorrien's property on her death. Because, you see, Miss Adelaide Harbord's property was carefully settled by her upon your mother to make her an income independent of Colonel Dorrien during her life, with reversion to you and your sister at her death. Yet by this deed you yield not only your own reversion, but the interest upon it during Mrs. Dorrien's life, that is, exactly half her income.'

'And why?' returned Grace, with an unnatural brilliance in her eyes and clear resonance in her voice. 'As I understand, to help my poor father out of his difficulties. A good reason.'

'Quite so,' he replied, touched almost to tears with the

certainty that this was only a bold, tentative guess, 'to satisfy this pressing creditor. It places you in a very sad position.'

'Surely, Wotton, one is bound to help one's parents at all cost to oneself,' she said, rising and taking a slight turn through the room, so that her face with its burning spots of red on each cheek was unseen.

'Not bound,' he replied, 'not to this. It is a splendid error, a beautiful misdeed. One can but honour you—you, whom I have always honoured, dear Grace—you, who have made yourself penniless for—others. Laura is safe; Mrs. Dorrien has half of what she had before; all three have the tiny pension due to a colonel's widow and children—nothing more. But, oh, Grace——'

The young man's voice broke; Grace, whose eyes had been anxiously scanning the parchment, as she walked away with it, returned and placed it on the table before him. He took the slim white hand, looking slimmer and whiter because of the dead-black gown, bowed over and kissed it.

'Dearest Grace,' he faltered, 'you know——'

'I know,' she replied, withdrawing her hand, 'that ten days ago I had a kind father. I know that he was buried yesterday. I can think of nothing else—except that I have a broken-hearted mother.' She spoke so evenly, in a voice so clearly resonant, that his heart died within him.

'But in the future, dear,' he pleaded, 'may I not hope?'

She laid her hand gently on the dark hair brushed in a heavy sweep over his forehead; the cool, gentle touch seemed to press something down and back into his heart.

'You *must* not hope, dear Wotton.'

'Then I'll worship without hope,' he burst out with suppressed fervour.

'Poor boy! Better not. Thanks for this,' waving her hand lightly over the papers and parchments spread out, confused and tumbled, on the table, and leaving the room, stricken to the heart.

'Oh, Daddy, Daddy, how *could* you?' she cried, standing with outspread hands in the room whence the coffin had been taken the day before. How long was it since her birthday? Three weeks or four? She understood it all well enough now, though it was incredible. Her mother's faintness—no wonder she was faint—her father's agitation and wild strokes at the billiard table —how [illegible]e play at all? Then the death-scene. The piteo[illegible]on in the glazing eyes, the cry for pardon, the

excuse—he meant well, he meant to put it right—the gambler's plea. No doubt he always meant well, and always meant to put everything right. 'Daddy dear, I do forgive you,' she sobbed to the empty, unheeding air. 'Thank God you said that. Ah! blessed God, let him know, let him *know* this that I could not say then—in my ignorance. How could I?'

Later, at the end of that day, Grace, who had remained alone after Lord Wotton's revelation, went into her mother's room, and found her crushed and drooping, half dressed, in an arm-chair before the fire.

'Is that you, Grace?' she asked, looking up fearfully, almost shrinkingly.

'Certainly it is I,' she replied coldly, standing, erect and tall, before her mother in the firelight, and waiting, white and weary, with marks of bitter weeping on her face.

Mrs. Dorrien looked away and began to tremble.

'Are you come to reproach me in my misery?' she asked, in a sort of stern defiance.

'Is it likely? Do I deserve this?' she replied. 'Why am I always misunderstood? Mother, I sometimes think you hate me.'

'I cannnot bear this. It is no moment for reproach. Am I not stricken enough? My father has cursed and abandoned me. My beloved, for whom I sinned and lost all, is for ever torn from me. Must my children, too, rise up against me and curse me?'

'Oh! mother, mother, do I deserve this? Can you know what you are saying?'

'Why then did you come? Where have you been all day long? My little Laurie was with me. *She* would never leave me.'

'Mother, I came to forgive you and to say good-night to you.'

Geoffrey Harbord's daughter looked at her own daughter, who saw the old man's unbending spirit in the blue eyes and suddenly aged face of his stricken child.

'Wotton asked me how I came to do such a mad thing, and I made as if I knew. I said I did it for my father's sake. May I be forgiven that lie, as I forgive you and my dear, dear father, who asked pardon of me with his last breath. But, oh, mother, how could you? How could you?'

Mrs. Dorrien suddenly gave way and sobbed aloud.

'You don't know, you cannot know,' she cried. 'I loved him, I gave up everything for him. And if a father, why not a child? Ah! how should you, a child like you, know what it is to love

and live with such a man? Marry a good man, or marry not at all. Better die of grieving for a good man than be loved by and live with such a man as that.'

'Oh, mother, this is dreadful!' cried Grace, paler if possible than before. 'Oh, mother, you are speaking of my dead father!'

'What is death?' she replied, wildly sobbing. 'Oh, Grace, I am a most unhappy woman. It was the only way to stave off ruin—not only from him, but from us all. And if I took your money, it was mine first—mine for life. And you could only have had it through me.'

'Poor mother!' Grace said, kneeling by her side and taking her to her heart. 'Poor troubled mother! Forget that. Forget all the trouble. We are ruined; we have but a pittance to keep us from actual want. But we have each other. You have two children, remember. What is wealth? What are all his riches to poor lonely, deceived grandfather? He may not speak to his own flesh and blood. A Judas sits at his hearth and pours poison into his ears. If Brinson would but die! Then you would see——'

'I should never see my father, Grace. If my misery—if my last letter could not touch him—as it could not, for I wrote very humbly and beseechingly, nothing ever will—never, never, never!'

'Grandfather has not seen the letter. Judas burnt it no doubt. Mother, I will do all I can to make you happy. Don't mistrust me any longer. Let Mursie help you to bed. Here she comes. Good-night. Sleep well, mother; sleep, sleep!'

Mrs. Dorrien slept, as she had not slept for many a weary night.

Much bitterness was behind her in the past, but much was in store for her in the immediate future. Her affairs she declined to investigate; Lord Wotton was to arrange all with lawyers and creditors; and if anything had to be done, or her signature was required, it was always, 'Ask my daughter; ask Miss Dorrien.'

To sell Belwood, that last corner of all the Dorrien possessions, that little Zoar, mortgaged and redeemed and mortgaged again, but still the one family refuge left, was bitter, but there were bitterer things still. The heiress of Hardwin Hall, of Harbordtown, of all the Harbord millions, had no roof to cover her head. Friends talked of apartments—flats were not yet invented—of a country cottage cheaply rented; she had not even furniture. That, with all else—plate, jewels, pictures, books, Broadwood grand pianos, carriages, stock, all not lost before—went in this great wreck, and still the debts were not cleared. Sir Geoffrey's

cheque had melted. The interest due on Grace's reversion was high, that obtainable on trustee money low; Mrs. Dorrien had even anticipated her pension; she had bound herself to pay it out as it came in. Where could they live on their small remnant? There was a debt known to none but Mrs. Dorrien, a debt of honour to an old brother officer, whose widow was not far from want. When Grace heard of this, she began to think their income might at last be reduced to a positive deficit.

'Pay a long visit to Newcourt Place,' the Wottons said, 'and look about and choose a new home.'

It was during this visit that the difficulty of letting the ghost-peopled Old House was one day discussed. Not only, Mrs. Dorrien heard, was the Old House no source of income, but a perpetual expense; besides which, it was going to rack and ruin for want of tenants. It had been vainly offered to a farm bailiff at a nominal rent—not even a caretaker could be induced to go into it after dark, much less live in it. The Dorriens heard the discussion with polite but cold interest; other subjects took its place. That night before sleeping Grace said to her mother, 'Let us take the Old House.'

Mrs. Dorrien felt that the obligation would be too humiliating. But Lord Wotton put it as a favour. A few years' occupation would not only preserve the Old House from total dilapidation, but redeem its character.

When Mrs. Dorrien at last yielded, she drank from a bitter cup, telling herself that she owed it to Grace and Laura in expiation of direct wrong to one and indirect wrong to the other. At this time some houses, which constituted part of Aunt Adelaide's property, were lost by subsidence of water-mined ground, a misfortune no house is insured against.

'Never mind, mother dear; we can't lose *much* more,' Grace said in consolation. And when all was at last decided, and they were setting forth from Newcourt over the downs to Barling, they felt somewhat like storm-tossed derelicts towed into port at last. The girls' youth asserted itself after the long winter's sorrow; spring bounded in their veins; sunshine, blossom, and fresh verdure were once more sweet and stimulating; singing of birds woke echoes in their hearts.

'We are going *home*, Laurie,' Grace said, when the carriage joined them at the top of the long hill, and they sprang into it almost before the footman could open the door.

'Mother, raise that horrid veil and *look*,' Laura cried. But Mrs. Dorrien said she had seen it so often; she had driven over

with Lady Wotton while the girls were visiting old friends, to look at the Old House and see what was needed to make it habitable. They were debating this when a little cry from Grace, followed by a burst of tears, startled them.

'Nothing—oh! nothing,' she stammered, 'but those fir-tops! Mentone! Look!'

Only some fine Scotch firs suddenly discovered beneath them on their left, their domed tops traced on a deep blue sea running inland, recalling stone-pines on the Mediterranean. 'But why should Jack cry at that?' Laura wondered. Jack scarcely ever cried. Mrs. Dorrien drew the folds of her heavy veil closer, wondering if Mark Hilton would care to come *now*.

They turned a corner and came on the summit of the last hill, which ran steeply down to hidden Barling, the spire of which was visible. Sandyknowe Bay spread blue and calm before them, bounded on the right by red sand cliffs, on the left by chalk cliffs; a little to the left, immediately in front of them, rose the fine sweep of Culveredge Down, which ran out to the Channel, forming the point of the peninsula. Barling Harbour, land-locked and still, spread to the left, then came more sea with wooded country between; the road wound so that sometimes they seemed to be dipping to the marshlands by Sandyknowe Bay, sometimes into Barling Harbour. The chalky road was steep and rutted, yet the horses sometimes slipped up on the polished chalk. The girls were soon out again, bounding along the low turf banks between road and down, where cowslips danced in the breeze. What a breath of keen, sweet, sea-air, what a prospect! Barling Church, grey and storm-tinted, cottages and homesteads, buried in apple bloom and creepers. Thatched roofs, red roofs, stiles and lanes leading off the down, sheep scattering hither and thither. Now the carriage was straining and shaking in a deep, rutted lane overhung with tangled hedges, where wild clematis, blackberry, wild rose, and honeysuckle, ran riot among sloe and crab and cornel bush, with ivy hanging over miniature cliffs. But, lo! what house is this behind iron gates, with grassy approach, garden and orchard all ablow with pear, cherry, and budded apple, showing gay against walnut-trees and the green down-slope that rose behind it? The timbered overhanging front, the porch, the sundial, the bay-window, the gables, all seemed home-like, old familiar friends.

'I know the house well,' Grace said, with a smile and a sigh, a sad smile and a contented sigh; 'I have seen it in dreams over and over again. I have often sat in that sunny window and

been glad and sorry, but mostly sorry. I know that the room is wainscotted; the wainscot is painted white and carved.'

Thus Grace came to the home that was so long to be hers—not on wheels, but on foot; not knowing that she would leave it one far day, neither on wheels nor on foot. The three ladies were grave, and very near tears, when the carriage stopped before the side door, and young Lord Wotton appeared as it opened, with a warm welcome, to hand them out.

'Opening into a street!' whispered Laura, as if that circumstance was a calamity beyond expression.

The first thing that met Grace's view in the dimness of the black-beamed interior was the hard, selfish face of bluff King Hal beside the Tudor lady in the ruff; then, lowering her gaze from the contemplation of this disparaging pair, it fell on the kind features of Mursell, waiting in the obscurity, with her old-fashioned curtsey to each in turn.

'Good-morning, Mursell; it is very pleasant and homelike to see you,' Mrs. Dorrien said, and Laura echoed; but Grace threw her arms round the faithful friend with a warm pressure, buried her face in the loyal breast, and said nothing, while Mursell winked a couple of tears away.

Mursell had duly received notice when the other servants were discharged; but it is one thing to be given a thing, quite another to accept it.

'No, Miss Carrie, dear,' she replied, 'do ye think I'll leave ye now after all these years? Who but Mursie would make ye comfortable and see after the yoong leddies? Nay, dearie, I've no wish to leave at all.'

'Nor I to lose you, dear Mursell. But I have neither home nor money now. I cannot have any maid at all. Should we creep into some cottage, we must be content with one rough girl to do necessary things.'

'Then I'll stay on for love,' Mursell replied; 'I've put money by in plenty. My home is where you and the yoong leddies are, mem.'

And when the Old House was taken and Mursell told that this sacrifice of her time and labour could not be accepted, she replied—

'Then, Miss Carrie, dear, the Old House is sizable, and I'll just come and board and lodge with ye at a fair price. And to pass the time away—for I could never abide to be idle—I'll scrub and clean and cook for ye.' So the end of it was that she had to be taken, with a few other valuables saved from the shipwreck, to the Old House, and was induced to receive a small wage in partial return for her services.

'Taken the Old House at Barling, have they?' Sir Geoffrey was saying. 'Well, with the interest of Adelaide's portion and their pensions, I suppose they will manage to starve respectably there. They'll have some kind of one-horse rattle-trap and a coachman out of livery, with a boy under him. The coachman will be gardener and factotum. They'll have a couple of serving wenches indoors. They'll have the parson and his wife to tea, and dine out five times a year. Mrs. Dorrien will go round the village with tracts and flannel petticoats. Ha! ha! I think I see Caroline Dorrien inquiring for Goody Two-shoes' rheumatism, censuring Jenny's ribbons and sweethearting, exciting herself about the choir, and having cottage flower-shows on her lawn. They'll sing and play in village concerts, and be looked up to as "His Lordship's" cousins. I *suppose* the county will call—eh, Brin? Well, well, if she had had *one* spark of natural affection, one remnant of conscience, she might have been—*here*. The Old House is venerable, though not her own, but it isn't exactly Hardwin Hall. Ha! ha! ha!'

The savage chuckle jarred on the tense nerves of Mr. Hythe-Harbord. He thought it ugly and indecent.

'My cousins will be an acquisition to the county,' he observed with dignity. 'You know the Old House, no doubt. I have seen only drawings of it.'

Sir Geoffrey had known the Old House when it was half a century younger. He remembered cantering over the downs with Lady Grace Garenne, when first engaged to her, to pay his respects to a dowager Lady Wotton living at the Old House. A whole wing had become uninhabitable since then; the inn opposite the Old House, at which coaches now stopped, was then a gardener's or coachman's dwelling; the highroad, instead of running immediately by one side of the house and having garden in front and stable-yard and shrubbery behind, had courteously bent away and taken a circuit round, leaving it, as before related, in dignified seclusion. It was then suitably furnished in an old-fashioned style, and beautifully kept without and within—a stately and sufficient dower-house for an aged lady, with its stables properly filled and a full staff of men and maids.

He remembered the white wainscotted room with the sunny windows, the harpsichord on which young Lady Grace had played to accompany her fresh sweet voice; the very songs she sang he recalled after all these years. Some days are like sparse-set jewels on a golden belt; they sparkle out on the memory with a lustre not easy to explain; that day had been such a one to this

lonely old man. He looked up at the sweet and speaking face of the portrait beneath the Rape of Persephone, and sighed a sigh worth years of ordinary smiling; he saw the figure, slim and sylph-like, in its quaint bygone riding-dress; heard her singing in the morning of life and of love; smelt the scent of walnut leaves, clove pinks, roses, and gilly-flowers stealing through the open window. Poor Grace had been sweet to him that morning, unbending from the cold reserve of those more formal days; birds' songs, delicious breezes, sea-scents, and young love all mingled in memory with the singular charm that belonged to the white-and-gold drawing-room that no one ever entered in youth or age without feeling in some measure. Singular to think that the daughter and granddaughters of that loved and long-lost girl, singing then at the harpsichord, were now making that house their home. More singular still had he known the decadence of the house itself and of the fortunes of those three women.

Never since writing the letter that gave her such bitter pain had Sir Geoffrey spoken the younger Grace's name, nor was Brinson suffered to mention it in his hearing. But when the old man, as often happened now, passed an hour with Mrs. Hythe-Harbord in the warm and pretty boudoir to which she was day by day more restricted, and the two were quite alone, he liked to hear her talk of 'dear Cousin Grace.'

Brinson observed that his uncle was much changed of late. He had not touched the organ since he played the great dirge on the day the news of Colonel Dorrien's death came. Many other occupations had been given up during the succeeding winter. There were no more dances, seldom and more seldom any guests at dinner; no more play-acting in the beautiful and spacious theatre; no more painting, decorating, building, or planting, either at Hardwin or on other properties. He sat much in his study, reading and dozing over the fire; he walked chiefly in the rose-garden or in the linden avenue where Grace first met him. Brinson often wondered what the old man was thinking of in these long, lonely reveries. The day came when he knew.

CHAPTER II

THE vague and indefinable charm of the Old House had far greater power upon casual visitors than upon those not compelled to live in it. Laura became depressed and tearful as evening closed in on the first day; Grace too high-spirited.

'It's a poem; no, a romance,' she said at dinner, a repast scantly lighted with one pair of candles, cooked, served, and waited on by faithful Mursell alone. 'Something delightful and unexpected must happen to people who live in such a house.'

'Unexpected, perhaps; delightful, never,' Mrs. Dorrien sighed. 'Nothing can ever be delightful for me again.'

'Anything pleasant here would certainly be unexpected,' Laura added petulantly. 'It is "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow."' She was very tired by a few hours spent in exploring the ruins, in seeing if this and that 'would do,' and such and such personal belongings had arrived. A harp, two guitars, and some castanets were amongst the salvage. Grace had already unpacked, dusted, and tuned these instruments, arranged a few favourite books, drawings, and portraits here and there, and found some picturesque old crocks to hold flowers lavishly culled from the old-fashioned garden. In the hall a helmet, black with age and grey with dust, now partially removed, was gay with sweet plumes of white lilac.

But every attempt to make the place habitable disclosed some fresh lack of things hitherto held necessary; and when, after a most inferior dinner, the three ladies reached the drawing-room through a dim chill house, lighted only by a glimmering dip here and there, the question suddenly arose, 'Where are the papers, periodicals, novels?' Certainly not in the Old House.

'Send,' Mrs. Dorrien began, and then stopped, remembering that there was no one to send and nowhere to send to. 'Not that it is of any moment to me,' she explained; 'nothing can hurt me now.'

'Nonsense, mother dear,' Grace retorted. Suppose Laurie were to die. Wouldn't that hurt?'

'How *can* you speak in that manner, Grace?' Mrs. Dorrien cried angrily. 'Impertinent, ill-bred, cruel!'

Grace rose, went to the music-stool, drew the harp to her, and struck a few random chords. Her arms gleamed white in the firelight—for the candles were almost lost in gloom—whiter from contrast with her black dress, her face was drawn in a heavy frown, hidden by the shadow of the harp-pillar. She began in a minor key, modulated to the major, thence glided into that waltz, 'The Guards.' Then the frown relaxed, the tense lips softened, the dark eyes filled with liquid lustre as the room thrilled with love-laden melody; flames leapt up, or seemed to leap in time with the music; light and sound were interchanged. Grace harped well; she was pleased with the way in

which the bare room, with its resonant wainscotting, took the music. Laura, nestled in the corner of an old-fashioned sofa, began to doze. By the time the waltz was played through a look of perfect beatitude was on the harper's face.

'I am surprised, Grace, that you can care for jigs and dances so *soon*,' her mother said querulously; 'the first night, too. I often wonder how it is that your feelings are so blunt.'

'Will you have "Home, Sweet Home," then, mother?'

'Only an excessively cruel or stupid person could propose such a thing.'

'One of the Irish melodies then?'

'It is not of the smallest consequence to *me*. Play your jigs or your dirges as you will. *I* am beyond the reach of such trifles for ever.'

'You are tired,' Grace said, preluding 'Desolate is the dwelling of Morna,' and beginning to sing it, when a petulant cry of 'Shut up; *do* sing something more cheerful,' from Laura, stopped her. So she sang—

'Go where glory waits thee,
But while fame elates thee,
Oh! still remember me,'

rose and left the room, remembering that Mursell was alone in the rambling old ruin.

Laura broke down completely when she went to her room to climb into a huge thick-curtained four-post bedstead, adorned at each corner with immense black plumes, and soon sobbed herself to sleep like a tired child. Grace read a piece of *Vita Nuova*, and lay long awake, looking through the uncurtained window at the clear, starry sky, till there sounded from the orchard the rich, thick warble of a nightingale, then another and another, and she opened her window to listen, and fell asleep till morning.

Day brought more cheerful faces, all sorts of plans and hopes to the girls, a sort of melancholy acquiescence to Mrs. Dorrien.

'We'll make cowslip wine,' Grace said, 'and have a boat in the bay. Mother, it is only a mile or so to Sandyknowe; you'll come, won't you? Why should we not have a donkey chair? Donkeys cost next to nothing, and live upon thistles. The downs are covered with thistles. Let us go gipsying, bathing, and boating all the summer; in autumn we can make nutting parties; and in the winter——'

'Die,' observed Laura, who was eating an egg warm from the nest.

'Well, winter can wait. Besides, there is no occasion to stay

here unless we like it, and who knows what may turn up in the meantime?'

'You have your lives before you,' their mother said; 'you have hope. You will both marry, I trust. We cannot look as high as we did. I ask only a gentleman and a good man for each of you.'

'Only!' Grace thought to herself; but Mrs. Dorrien was unconscious of the irony of her demands.

Their first guest appeared in the person of Raymond Garenne, whose ship, the *Invincible*, a fine old heart-of-oak three-decker, was visible at anchor from the downs. Raymond was the second son, two years younger than Wotton; at present a lieutenant, a handsome youth of three-and-twenty, with the genial manner and easy charm of those who live upon salt water. Sunshine seemed to penetrate the darkest recesses of the Old House on his entrance.

'I wanted to be first-foot in the house,' he said. 'Why, you've turned it into a Paradise already. Any ghosts? Let me do that, Grace,' mounting steps to hang curtains for her. After that, Mr. Garenne's coat disappeared, hammers, nails, and screws came into his hands, and the few household gods from Belwood were put in their places amid much laughter and mirth. Luncheon was taken disjointedly on step-ladders and stairs; and by five o'clock the two girls and their *cavaliere servente*, brushed and tidy, had accomplished their tasks, and were drinking tea happily in the sunshiny garden, when even Mrs. Dorrien smiled and seemed more cheerful.

'Why, Laurie,' Grace said at dinner, their sailor having returned to his ship, 'you never told me what a nice boy Raymond is. I've scarcely seen him since he was a little mischievous middy.'

Laura smiled and looked at her plate; her mother smiled too; the evening had the quiet cheerfulness that is expectant of blithe to-morrows. The harpsichord was tried, guitars produced, songs and duets sung.

The *Invincible* was to be seen from the downs for two or three weeks, during which time the sailor cousin was often at the Old House, banishing gloom and ghosts, and filling the rooms with the cheerful sound of his voice and step and ready laughter, but leaving a sad blank when the ship sailed.

But that blank gradually filled; the summer passed pleasantly; the quiet country life, long walks by woodland, down, and sea, were novel, and sufficiently exciting to people still fresh from a great bereavement. Barling itself was not without interest; it

possessed an ancient, long disused townhall, beneath which the parish stocks, in good working order, survived to that late day. In the centre of the village was a massive piece of iron, bearing an aperture for a thick iron ring or rope, firmly imbedded in the ground, over which the ladies pondered long before they discovered that it was a bull-ring, and imagined the sport with shuddering disgust. The church was interesting; views offered on all hands to fill their sketch-books; quaint cottages and old-fashioned houses and gardens were everywhere.

'Barling,' Grace wrote to a friend, 'was dropped from King John's luggage just before he lost it all in the Wash. It is chiefly peopled by old maids and lunatics, harmless but tiresome. There must have been at least five generations of old maids to produce a type so firmly differentiated from the rest of man and womankind. It is reported that there has not been a man in any Barling family—I speak, of course, of the gentry—for at least a hundred and fifty years; but occasionally a widow has been born even in prim families. Barling has one shop, at which everything is sold and nothing bought. It smells of cheese, boots, candles, and bacon. Whatever you demand they are "just out of." The town contains one fly, drawn by a superannuated carthorse with a bad cough. This horse, when not ploughing, is usually lame, except when the driver is drunk. The fly is seldom ordered, except by the whole village *en masse*; it is then always found to be engaged for a funeral. Funerals are the only festivities ever heard of in Barling; they are, fortunately, frequent enough to prevent the population from dying of dulness. It is reported, on doubtful authority, that a wedding once took place in Barling Church within the memory of man—or rather woman.

'The only men in Barling are the vicar—an old Oxford don—the doctor, and one small curate, who blushes and flees as before a pestilence on our approach. The very ghosts at the Old House are females. Barling is nine miles from everywhere except the sea, eight from Oldport, and three from St. Ann's, a little watering-place with three shops and a pier. There is a post office at Barling; but it is wiser to step over to St. Ann's with letters, because the post-mistress is so old and dim-eyed that it takes her several days to read the letters before she sends them on or delivers them. This postal uncertainty is the only exciting element in Barling—except keeping poultry—and gardening. The great excitement in gardening is wondering if there will be any fruit; but there never is, because when any comes it ripens all at once, and the birds get up early and immediately eat it all. The only way to get out of

Barling—except by dying, which we never shall, because the air is so fatally healthy—is by walking or running—unless you get into the coach that comes through once a day from St. Ann's, and *never returns*, so that nobody knows where it goes to—is the fly I mentioned before. Except on Saturdays, when Chip, our gardener, a chip of the very oldest block in the world, leads a farm-wagon slowly over the downs to Oldport market and back. Once, I seem to have heard, he was ill and couldn't go, so the horses went without him, and returned at the right time. Chip's absence was never observed.

'The county has now called—all the county Guys that is—they all said exactly the same thing in exactly the same way. Laura and I walked to return the nearest cards; even the county Guys shuddered at the sight of us; the roads being chalky and white, we looked exactly like Lot's wife, except our faces, which were in hue the peony, but *not* from bashfulness. The vicar and vicaress were amongst the earliest callers. My mother said to the former, "What a fine old church you have!" After looking at her earnestly and thoughtfully through his spectacles for some minutes, Mr. Attwood replied, "Do you know, dear Mrs. Dorrien, I think I have heard that observation of yours somewhere before." So, hoping to relieve him from the tedium of commonplace, I said, "Which would you rather do, Mr. Attwood—go to heaven immediately, or wait a few years first?'

'He looked exactly like a blend of owl and elderly cherub; and, after blinking steadfastly through his glasses at me for some five minutes—during which mother looked like the Commination Service bound in black crape—he said very slowly and distinctly, "Since you do me the honour to be interested in personal matters of a nature so intimate, Miss Dorrien, I have no hesitation in avowing that, were I permitted any option in the matter, I should distinctly prefer to wait until I have completed my annotated edition of five Greek plays, and have ascertained from the unquestioned evidence of actual experience whether the soil and atmosphere of Barling be or be not favourable to the rapid growth of the beech, since I have been at some expense and trouble in planting an avenue of that elegant and classic tree upon the glebe. I should also," he added, without the slightest change of countenance, "were I again permitted option in the matter, greatly desiderate the satisfaction of seeing some of my younger and fairer parishioners well on the way before me first." I could have hugged him for this.

'His sermons have many heads, but it's a very long way to

their tails; the pews being old square ones, however, the sleep of the just is in no way interfered with. His wife looks like a large apple-dumpling with a small apple on the top. She never says "I think," but "Miss Tattwood thinks."

'"Have you lived long at Barling?" my mother asked her. Whereupon she at once replied, 'Miss Tattwood says that we shall shortly complete our fifteenth year of residence here."

'"I hope it won't rain before you reach home," I politely observed, with my sweetest smile, on accompanying them to the front door, which is at the side, and opens immediately on to the street. Pat came the answer, "Miss Tattwood says that with such a sky the rain always keeps off till nightfall."

'At first we wondered who on earth the infallible spinster so constantly cited could be, until the cherubic owl addressed his little wife as "Miss Attwood, my dear." I dined once with Miss Tattwood and Miss Attwood to meet the village doctor, a nice old man, who lives in his saddle, only leaving it occasionally to take in food and perhaps sleep. Mr. Cartmel has iron-grey hair, a red face, and a provincial accent. Some of his idioms are charming. When he swears he always says, "Beg pardon, my dear," to me; "Sir," or "Ma'am," to Miss Tattwood and Miss Attwood. I played the guitar and sang a little. It must have given pleasure; for Mr. Cartmel was good enough to say, "That's the sort of merry jingle for me. None of your wry-mouthed caterwauls and yowls to the tune the old cow died of. I like young folk to be cheerful and gay; they can't be young only once. I don't see any sense in looking like a dying duck in a thunderstorm—cheerfulness keeps the liver active."

'Miss Tattwood then observed that the art of music was coeval with the history of the human race, and that no religious ritual had ever been without it. He explained the construction of the Greek lute, and compared ancient musical rhythms with Gregorian chants.

'Miss Tattwood said, "Thank you, my dear; you sing very prettily."

'There is a Mrs. Cartmel, a kind, homely old soul, who called in clothes made long before I was born, and several young Cartmels.

'I forgot to say that we played whist. Though I only revoked five times, and scarcely ever forgot to trump my partner's best card, Miss Tattwood observed that "it was a delightful game, but it was not whist."

'Mursell, on being told to provide fish for the table, says that Barling people either fetch their fish from Oldport or go without.

We heard a great noise and excitement once; and seeing the whole population in the street screaming and surrounding two carts, sent Mursie out to see if any one was hurt. She returned, flushed with triumph, with twelve large and lovely mackerel for a few pence. That only happens once a year. The curate once or twice brought us some trout from the marsh stream, but the prospect of being thanked for them is so terrible to him that he has given it up. Such is Barling. But for the presence off Culveredge Point of a man-of-war containing a man and a cousin (one of the Garennes), we should have forgotten the ways of civilised intercourse. He has kept us alive, though we have become so rustic as to lose the civilised use of speech, and never say anything but exactly what we mean now, and only a quarter of that. We often look at our fingers to see if they are turning into laurel-leaves, and are careful not to remain standing too long lest we should take root like poor Daphne. Should you, after all, come to the Old House, do not expect civilised usages, or be greatly surprised if four lone, lorn women (including Mursell, our faithful and only servant) behave like the father of the Prodigal Son. It is lucky that money is of little use in these wild wastes, because we have none. Owing to some blunder of mine, I have lost my reversion to the wreck of my mother's tiny fortune. Thus I have not even expectations. But personally I never cared for money, *only* for what it brings.'

The person to whom this epistle was addressed thought it amazingly clever and interesting, though it was some weeks old before he received it; and, considering that he had Miss Dorrien's welfare much at heart, he was singularly untroubled by what she said of their poverty. Nay, he smiled at it almost as if it were good news.

'You ask me,' a later missive to the same correspondent said, 'how I pass my time in these remote and desolate regions. Principally, I fear, in grumbling and revolting and trying to conquer my discontent, except when scolding the others for grumbling and revolting and not trying to conquer theirs. Next to being satisfied with one's own virtues, nothing produces such celestial beatitude as rebuking the failings of others, as I seem to have read somewhere—surely not in *Thomas à Kempis*? To vary these exciting occupations, I gather and arrange flowers, make *pot pourri* and dry lavender; but Mursell says I ought to make jam too. I tell her I am quite content to make it disappear at the proper time. "*Dulce est desipere in loco*," as the Psalmist says. I dust the furniture, or it dusts me; read our

one belated paper; never dress. As we've nothing to wear, and no one to see, why should we? I think I must get dear Miss Tattwood to teach me Greek. Would Miss Attwood think it proper?

'The chief productions of Barling are primness, propriety, elderberry wine, rheumatism, roses, and raspberry bushes; they all grow wild, except the wine, which soon grows tame. Laura and I have painted and drawn everything that can be painted and drawn around Barling, except ourselves and the poultry. I can recite pages of Dante and Tasso, Shakespeare and Goethe, but we've nothing new to read except an old peerage. We often wish the ghosts were more sociable; they have not yet called. Even the lile curate lad would often be welcome to tea. I cannot think why he is so frightened of us; we respect his innocence and youth, and never even look pleasantly at him, much less flirt. On the rare occasions when the Newcourt carriages drive up—Newcourt has been empty for months—or we lunch there—it's too far to dine unless we sleep—we are ill with excitement. Once when two old friends and Raymond Garenne simultaneously and unexpectedly arrived before luncheon, we were demoralised for a week. There was nothing to eat, because the butcher only comes twice a week; so Mursie, hearing that Miss Attwood was returning from Oldport, cleverly ran out, stopped her, and *borrowed* the fish she knew she would have brought with her. I wonder if Miss Tattwood said naughty words about it? When Raymond comes alone, we give a carpet dance in this way—I play a waltz, and Laurie and Raymond dance; then Laurie plays a mazurka or hornpipe, and Raymond and I dance. We observe all the forms—look at our programmes—to keep ourselves up to the mark.

'Your suggestion that we should try to create interest for ourselves is too delightful. If I could do so, I would at once double mother's dividends twice; but Wotton says good interest means bad security, and the little she has is tied up in the Three per Cents., or Consols, as they are sometimes called. I can't think why; there is nothing consoling to me in getting the lowest dividends possible. It is so kind of your sister to offer to send us new music and books. I dare not accept her invitation, or any that now come, to stay a week or two with her. If one of us leaves home, it makes it so terribly dull for the other.' She might know this from experience, Laura having gone away several times.

An incident that occurred before these letters were written

imparted a tone of gaiety that might not else have been so evident in them.

One September morning Mrs. Dorrien received an Indian letter among the dwindling budget that now found its way to Barling, the opening of which formed the brightest incident in the day.

'From Captain Hilton,' she unnecessarily announced, since both girls had seen the morning delivery and recognised the writing. 'He is not able to come home this year, as he had hoped. It will be another year now. He is infinitely disappointed.'

Mrs. Dorrien sighed heavily; the sunshiny morning lost its brightness; a robin singing near the open window suddenly lapsed into a mournful minor key, the song a moment before had been a voice of joyous hope unburdened by fear or regret. The three ladies feared to look at each other, lest each should surprise too much sorrow on the others' faces. Grace was pouring out tea; she was very exact in measuring the sugar and milk, also very slow. When the cup was full, she rose slowly and carried it to her mother, setting it down without a word, and taking a long circuit behind, instead of before, her. She then observed that Laura's delicate face was bent with affected interest over another letter, and the corners of her mouth drooped mournfully; she was glad there were no tears. Returning to her place by the teapot, she raised her cup twice to her lips, and had to set it down; the trembling lips could not drink. No one had courage to break the heavy silence for some minutes.

'Suppose,' Grace said then with forced cheerfulness, 'suppose we gather walnuts for Mursell this morning; it would be great fun.'

'I 'm sick and tired of spoiling my hands with garden messes,' Laura returned querulously. '*Do* propose something more amusing, Jack dear. You are growing *so* slow and stupid in this hole of a place.'

'Shall we go to Sandyknowe and bathe? Walk to St. Ann's and shop, or take our luncheon on the downs? No? Nothing amusing enough? It is a beautiful day. What *can* we do?'

Laura said nothing, but took up her hat, a basket, and a pair of scissors, and went into the garden. Grace presently followed with another basket, intending to gather walnuts; but when she reached the trees, instead of climbing and shaking them, she sat in their shade and lost herself in sad thought. She had dreaded Mark Hilton's coming; she had told herself again and

again that the best thing for her was never to see him more; and now the news that his coming was deferred for a year stopped her pulses and crushed the life out of her heart. Never had the dulness and dreariness of this routine of repressed vitality weighed so heavily upon her as now. A whole year, a whole weary twelve months of Barling monotony, before—what? Before the man she loved came to claim her sister's hand and take her over sea for years and years—perhaps for life. Any one but a fool would surely take it as a reprieve. No, she could not bear the delay; the hunger, the sick longing, only to hear his voice, only to touch his hand, was too great. She wanted that, and nothing more; that was life and bliss, nothing else, nothing more. It was a pure and beautiful passion surely; no harm could come of it. But just once, only once more to see his face. What had the whole world but that? The sere leaves rustled gently in the sunny air above; deep sobs shook her; Mursie's walnuts were forgotten; one or two pattered down unheeded. To see him, to become in some way aware of his presence, and feel assured of his inmost soul, as so often in happy times past, and then exhale the whole perfume of her life, cease upon the sunshine of his smile, be to him a remembered fragrance, to herself nothing. Memory is starvation; these often recalled moments in the Riviera, moments brief and fleeting, but instinct with life of life, were growing pale and faint; they needed renewal and repetition. Did they? Was it not right, as well as wise, to let them fade and leave her free? No; never that, never more the old soulless, unworthy freedom; better a thousand times the blessed bondage that gave birth to all that was worth anything, however painful; better keenest agony of longing than the old sterile, careless life, with its trivial interests and puerile delights; better, after all, noble pain than ignoble joy. The heavy sobs calmed, a great peace filled her heart.

She did not know that she had made the one great step in spiritual life while wrestling thus under the walnuts; had learned how to be above happiness.

CHAPTER III

AN hour later, on that sunny forenoon, Mursell's heart was gladdened by the appearance of a heavy basket of walnuts, borne into the dark, cool kitchen by her favourite nurseling, with—

'If you are not thankful, Mursie, you ought to be. It's a fine thing to sit in a nice cool kitchen this hot morning, while people are climbing trees, and shaking and beating them, and spoiling their hands with these horrid black things. There!'

'Eh, dearie, it's poor work for a winsome yoong leddie; poor work, dearie; but ye'll no repent making life a wee bit easier for others.'

'Mursell,' she cried, with sudden compunction, 'you work too hard. You have black lines under the eyes, you are haggard; dear Mursie, you must not. Mother must get an older servant to help you. That little Sally is not enough.'

'Miss Greecie, dear, I'll tell ye Gospel truth—Sally is too expensive for the house. It's fair and true, Missie. But ye'll no say it to the mistress.'

'Tell me what I can do, Mursell. I'll do anything to help you and spare my mother. I wish I had thought of it before.'

She was seen no more by her mother and sister till their frugal luncheon was served, when she was gay and cheery, as people often are when they have been doing unpleasant things for love and duty. But when she saw Laura's dispirited, drooping face, and observed that she had no appetite, she chid herself for selfish indulgence in sorrow.

'I'll learn fishing,' she said; 'a dish of trout would often give Laura a change. I'm going to learn cooking too. My price will soon be far above rubies. That exacting Mursell wants mushrooms now. We'll go and pick them for her, shall we?'

Mrs. Dorrien looked at the vivid face and soft, lustrous eyes with perplexity. What did she see there? No sign of tears, no trace of the tempest that had shaken the passionate nature to its depths three hours before. Smiling sweetness, a curious something—was it irony or cynicism?—in the mouth, nothing more. 'Surely,' she thought, 'these shallow, sparkling natures are blessed; they shake sorrows that would crush others from their airy wings, as lightly as a water-fowl throws the river from its plumage, and flit cheerily on from joy to joy; one hope crushed, they pass on to another unclosing its bloom for them. The blank of another year's parting and deferred hope—yet she could jest, plan petty festivities, and be interested in mushrooms and domestic trivialities. The Dorrien strain showed clear in this child, who took so little from her own blood,' she thought.

'It matters little where we go or what we do,' Laura replied sadly; 'but, of course, I will go to amuse you, Jack.'

'We'll go to Culveredge then, over the down. I know some dells there where mushrooms are thick. We'll take field-glasses and rake the Channel. Do come too, mother, and let us have gipsy tea. It will be—stunning.'

Mrs. Dorrien preferred being alone with a quiet afternoon before her for letters. The girls were to take Duke, the collie, the household sentinel, as escort—poor Duke, always sad now for the dead master he had loved above all the wide world. Their mother watched them climb the long green slope from the drawing-room window, two slim black figures and one small brown one, with baskets distributed between the three. Poor girls, what a melancholy amusement, what a heavy change, with their youth and beauty, accomplishments, and high expectations. For herself, she had drained the cup of life, drinking deep of its bitterness, but somewhat of its sweetness too; she had been too much absorbed in her own pain, she thought, her eyes filling with tears of compunction and pity. After all, the first ache of bereavement past and ruined fortune accepted, this remote still life had repose and healing, almost charm. And even this vexatious deferring of the desired marriage had its compensation for her. She would keep her daughter for one more year at least; the sisters would not yet be parted. She liked to think that Grace might have been—might still be—Duchess of Ormonde or Countess Wotton, yet with all her pride she did not greatly wish it. She had suffered too much, as the wife of a profligate and the daughter of a man who set great store on position and wealth, to wish anything for her girls but the hand and heart of a high-minded gentleman with a competence.

The girls' spirits rose with their elevation above sea-level; they were refreshed and inspirited by the sparkle of the soft September afternoon. On either side and in front of them was sea, quiet and blue with the indescribable azure bloom that is like nothing else. They heard the low boom of surf breaking gently, its thunder muffled in contented calm, on the rocks below and on the point before them, narrowing far out to sea where the lighthouse rose.

'Only five months!' Grace sighed, after long silence, as they rested upon the deep soft turf and watched vessels sailing by. An East Indiaman steaming along under its smoke-cloud, a white troop-ship, some old-fashioned gunboats, their sails of magical soft hues in sunlight and reflected sea-light; far away a stately three-decker with her tiers of guns, another lying at

anchor, her yards crowded with men. Presently they heard the far-echoing boom of a salute.

'Five months to what?' Laura asked.

'Since we have been here; we only came in April.'

'It seems five years—or five lifetimes. Oh, Jack, Jack! Is it all right, or is it *your* fault that he isn't coming?'

'Dear Laurie, how should it be my fault? What can you mean? Of course, he cannot get his furlough now. You heard what he wrote to mother. I think you might trust *him*, Laurie. Sometimes I wonder if you really care for him.'

'Oh, but I do though,' Laura replied in a matter-of-fact tone; 'I really like him. The Shadow is so handy, and he has any amount of sense. It *would* have been such a break in the monotony of this desert life this autumn if he had come, as he intended.'

Grace looked at her with amazement.

'I should think it *would* have been a break,' she exclaimed. 'Well, well!'

'Did you write some sharp thing, and so put him off?' Laura continued. 'He is very sensitive, you know, and you *can* snub people, Jack dear. You are so used to being worshipped and having to put lovers down, that you do it by habit sometimes, unconsciously.'

'But what matter if I did?' Grace returned. 'It is not as if *I* were the attraction! All the snubs I am master of would not keep *your* adorers away.'

'Grace!' shrieked Laura, 'you can't *mean* what you say. I see no point in it if you intend it for a joke. You don't really think Mark Hilton was coming for *me*, do you?'

'Don't *you*?' faltered Grace, going very white. 'Doesn't mother? Doesn't everybody? Isn't it an understood thing?'

'Why, Gracie, of course not. Poor dear papa thought it was me at first, and then he pretended to, to tease you. But from the first anybody might have known. Don't you remember all the fuss about the little cross? And his absurd letter, when he hadn't the courage to give it personally, though he had given mother and me something, and left you out. And then the rage you were in! I thought from your being so furious with him that you *must* have cared for him. Else why should you mind?'

Grace's face went from white to red and red to white again; she was trembling and on the verge of tears. 'For the love of Heaven,' she faltered, 'don't deceive me, Laurie. Till this moment I thought it was you. I thought they all thought so.

And you were so grieved this morning.' Her face dropped in her hands, she shook. Laura was appalled.

'I was upset of course, because I knew there would be no fun for a whole year, and because I was sorry for you and the Shadow. But as for doubt—why, he actually has mother's consent to pay his addresses to you. Mother and I have settled it all over and over again, and often wondered that you should care for such a slow, steady fellow. Mother says it is the contrast between you. Now I, being quiet, don't like these very good young men. What I like is a laughing, rattling, careless man, like——'

'Like dear old Dad,' Grace supplied with a choked-down sob, while Laura looked straight before her with a deepened colour and embarrassed smile. 'How natural. Now, Duke, old boy, justify your existence and catch that stone. Laurie,' she added, with one bound from a reclining position to the tips of her slender feet, 'September is the loveliest month in the whole long year, and this is the loveliest time of the day. Look at those gulls sailing along with the light through them, the blue of the sea and the sky, the purple bloom of the land-distance and hill-shadows! There's the Old House and its orchard and trees basking in the warmth. It's a *dear* old place. The ships, look at their sails, and that tiny yacht dancing along. Hark to that lark! And what an air up here. Champagne is a fool to it. How nice it would be to have some friends in the fort yonder. Miss Tattwood has a nephew in the artillery; he was stationed there once. Come, Mr. Duke, mind your steps, sir.'

Poor Duke, with a wobegone countenance and limp tail, minded his hind steps as best he could, his doggish brain perplexed by the difficulty of having only two legs to dance upon, his fore-paws held in the hands of his agile mistress, whose gyrations were beyond his comprehension.

'What a queer girl you are, Jack dear! How can you dance like that?' Laura observed, languidly and daintily picking herself up, adjusting her balloony draperies, and resuming her ladylike progress over the down. '*I* think it disgustingly hot in this baking sun; we shall be as black as tinkers to-morrow, and sunburn is *so* unbecoming.'

Yet Laura was infected by her sister's gaiety, and even pleased with the abundance of mushrooms that rewarded their search. Both did justice to the slices of bread and butter and cake Mursell had put in the baskets, nearly forgetting poor Duke, whose gaze became more and more melancholy as the supply diminished.

until he expressed some shades of his anguish by a heartrending howl, soon comforted.

It was a happy little party that returned, laden with spoil, to Barling, dancing gaily down the long grey-green slope into the sunset that they faced, leaving long purple shadows behind them. Yonder, to the right, the last wagon creaked heavily over a golden stubble-field beneath its weight of golden sheaves, incandescent in the last level sunbeams; everywhere else the gleaming fields were shorn, and lay lustrous beneath dark hedges and purple-black elms. Barling Harbour received the crimsoning light on its still levels and held it faithfully; robins sang Good-night in silver treble; larks shot up in the blue on spires of eddying song; hovering rooks and sea-gulls sailed each on their airy ways; Barling spire and Culveredge down took each hue of the changing after-glow; grasshoppers churred gaily, and chafers buzzed. How refreshing the large rathe-ripe blackberries and dew-berries they plucked had been.

Duke stalked along with solemn gait and forbearing dignity, garlanded with frivolous honeysuckles. The mushroom baskets were decorated with the same, and quite hidden by harebells, marjoram, ladies' tresses and saxifrage, scabious, knapweed, and yellow hawk-bit, with trails of clematis, arrowy briony, large white cups, and graceful leaves, of convolvulus, roseberries, and other exquisite wildings. How pleasant to dip down into the little, old town, half buried in its orchards and glowing gardens, to pick out the chimneys and gables of the Old House, and the orange glow from a window in the dusk, and feel that it was home. A liquid star swung into the green sky above its gabled roof as they reached the door and came in, displaying their treasures.

They came into a darkness their youth and fresh beauty almost dispersed, and found a pensive mother, sitting lonely in the dusk of the withdrawing-room, yet with a faint thrill of pleasure mixed with wonder at their bright faces.

'Oh yes, mother dear, we take pleasure in little things now,' Laura said, rather sadly, 'else we should have none.'

'It's a question of proportion,' Grace added; 'a herd of buffalo looks down upon a flock of geese. Perhaps an eagle thinks a lark a poor creature upon the wing, a butterfly poorer still.'

Mrs. Dorrien marvelled and marvelled.

'What *is* she made of? Has she *no* heart?' she thought. But when, after dinner, Grace chose to sing the beautiful *scena*

from *Der Freischütz*, '*Piano, piano,*' to harp, guitar, and harpsichord, and burst out into the exultant passion of—

'Hence with every care and sorrow!
Joy is now my bosom's guest,'

the pathos of this sudden rapture smote her to the heart; a rush of tears blurred the beautiful, bright young face from her sight, while the clear voice pealed on with that subtle underthrill of anguish in its melodious joy. She touched the harp with lingering chords at the end of Grace's singing, and glided into a soft melody of her own before she spoke.

'You never sang that *scena* better, Grace,' she said then, letting the harp slide back to its upright position. 'It is a thousand pities you cannot have some more singing-lessons.'

Grace was taking many lessons more necessary and more important than singing. She was learning to love, to suffer, to put others before self, and—to cook. Having learned something of these, other and even sterner lessons were set her in the school of life by those exigent teachers—fate, time, and pain.

The brightness of that September day carried them far; it was proclaimed in the Old House that gathering and storing apples and pears and nuts was a most exciting and delightful pastime. Those proposed nutting excursions were joyously carried out in golden October afternoons, Mursell and Mrs. Dorrien, the latter an honorary or ineffective member, being compelled to join in them.

But when cold fogs gloomed over the marsh-meadows, blurring sea and sky; when chill, dank winds shook yellow elm-leaves over muddy lanes and wet fields; when November rains volleyed on windows, and storm-blasts howled and shrieked round chimneys and gables, wailing through keyholes, moaning and sobbing along corridors, and filling the ruins with eerie, indescribable noises, the lessening days were weary and short, and the dark, dense nights in the ill-lighted, ill-warmed house, that gave out the accumulated chill and damp of centuries, and had absorbed and lost all the sunshine of their summers, were long and dreary; the loneliness descended upon them like a pall, and stopped their very heart-beats. When snow came and drifted over and through the door and window facing the street, they knew what a prison might mean. Mineral oils were scarcely known, lamp oils expensive, candles dearer and of worse quality than now; the poor went darkly; artificial light was money. The ill-smelling tallow and mould candles of those days were insupportable to

Mrs. Dorrien; the best wax or darkness was her alternative. Thus long hours of fire-lit gloom were added to the depressing influences of that winter; yet with all economy it was not passed without incurring debt.

The art of being poor has to be acquired through experience by those not born to poverty; proportional expenditure is difficult; needless denials in one direction, needless expense in another, result from ignorance of it. Laura soon took a chill in the damp, draughty house; they listened to her harassing cough with aching hearts; their expeditions to Newcourt, impossible for Laura, were given up by her mother and sister. Lady Wotton and other friends and acquaintances called more and more rarely in the winter days; even Miss Tattwood and Miss Attwood were kept away by half a mile of mud, or rain, or fog. Sunday church-going had to be intermitted.

'Our greatest joy in winter,' Grace wrote to her correspondent, 'is a sunny day with passable roads. Not that any weather or any mud can keep me and Duke indoors. But our walks are lonely, and we make what Chip, our gardener, calls "a stabbling" over the house, especially over the Rectory, when I go there for Greek lessons. The dear old man is becoming quite fond of me—so vanity tells me.—"You do him good, my dear," his wife says, if I apologise for appropriating his leisure; "Miss Tattwood is fond of youth. He says that your Greek lessons have made him a boy again."

'I don't believe he ever *was* a boy. He came into the world middle-aged and learned, with that owl-like, inscrutable gaze, and elderly cherub face. I often picture him in long clothes, spectacles and all. But I'm glad to be of use in the world, having been considered merely ornamental for so long. We have joys we never dreamed of before we came to Barling. The coach thrills us with rapture. We always expect somebody to come by it, though nobody ever has. We tremble with excitement at the most distant glimpse of the postman. The rumble of carriage-wheels produces a fever of agitation. And when it proves to be a dog-cart, whence our cousin, Lord Wotton, descends with a basket of game and a box of hothouse flowers—what a festival! Sometimes a keeper brings game, and that is a *festa* for Mursie. Chip's wagon on a Saturday night is a joy; if he only brings us a packet of writing-paper it is something from the outer world. But Cousin Emma (Lady Wotton) arriving on a fine morning for luncheon I really think is what Chip calls "the head goo." Mother *lives* while Cousin Emma is in the

nouse, and poor little Laurie blooms. The men make Mursie festive in the kitchen; they are old servants she has known for years and years. Sometimes I think how dull and dreary the Old House might be if there were no Newcourt Place within reach, no nice old Attwoods and Cartmels, no sea and no downs. I *hope* Laura's cough is going at last.'

They always hoped, and were always disappointed. They relied so much on the spring. The first mild days inspirited them greatly, the cough improved, Laura basked in the sun and was gay. But the chill east wind that always follows mild spring days cut her up. Once the doctor was heard to say something about 'getting up May hill once more.' It rang like a funeral knell through their hearts. Grace followed him into the garden, and beckoned him aside.

'Will Laura die, Mr. Cartmel?' she asked. 'Tell me the truth.' She looked with so level a gaze in his eyes, and spoke in tones so neutral, that he was silent with surprise, and looked back, questioning and thoughtful, for some seconds before he replied—

'I cannot tell. No one can tell.'

'She is in danger,' Grace thought, going dead white. 'Can she recover? Can nothing be done?' she asked.

'We are doing all we can for her. She may live several years,' he replied. 'But she has phthisis of long standing, my dear. You are a sensible girl, Miss Dorrien, and no coward. Keep up your heart, keep her cheerful, and keep your mother cheerful. All depends on you.'

'But I cannot save her?'

'You can prolong her life—nothing more. I'm sorry for you, Miss Dorrien. But I see so much trouble. People die every day—hard deaths—tragic deaths—leaving want and desolation behind them.'

'And so many *live*,' she added, as if thinking aloud, with an expression that he could not interpret. She looked so childlike, yet so thoughtful, her eyes wistful, her lips smiling. The rough old doctor disliked tears, yet he would rather have seen them on this young face.

'Trust in God,' he said, taking the slender hand, bending over and kissing it, and suddenly striding off and away to Dapple, his trusty cob, that was munching leafage hanging over the wall outside. Dapple bore him many miles that day to many different scenes, but not away from the haunting gaze of those dark, soft eyes.

When he was gone, Grace went in and told Mursell, who knew already.

'Does mother know, Mursie?' she asked fearfully.

'Nay, dearie, she'll never know till it comes. She won't know; it's aye like that, especially in decline. They hope against hope, else how could they bear it?'

A great sob suddenly shook the girl in the rush of unutterable pity that struck her like a strong wave at the thought of her mother's burdened life, her bitter sorrows and bereavements. The marriage that had cost her so much, she knew well, had been most unhappy; the father she loved and mourned so truly had not—perhaps could not have—made a good husband. Sore sorrow it was for such as her mother to be bound to such as he. It had seemed but a few months since as if that poor mother could not be more heavily stricken; yet now her darling, the light of her life, was doomed; her desolation was not till now complete. She remembered little Geoffrey's death; what was that compared with this? The last hope of reconciliation with her grandfather was extinguished. Even if Sir Geoffrey should turn and relent at this eleventh hour, would his daughter greatly care, or could he bear the shock and agony of Brinson's lifelong treachery in his old age? Mr. Cartmel spoke of tragic deaths, hard deaths—of trouble, want, desolation. What did he know in his mature years more than she in her young youth? What did all this mean? Did Mark Hilton foresee this when he gave her the little cross as a suitable emblem? Nay, the cross meant faith, self-denial, endurance, and love—undying love, a treasure that none could rob, that never could fail. The cross lay warm under her dress; she felt it with every heart-beat; she would wear it all her life long.

It was a perfect May morning, everything was fresh and pure in the spring renascence, as in the first birth from the Creator's hand; the matchless glory of young leaves, innumerable blossom, prodigal life, the singular clarity of May in the deep blue sky, deeper and clearer for the white dazzle of high-sailing clouds, revealing chasms of blue as they parted and passed. Why was earth so lovely and life so sad? Beyond the old garden, itself a marvel of fresh bloom and verdure, were meadows flooded with buttercups in lavish glory; beyond all, the blue bloom of the quiet sea. A blackbird burst into a rapture of mellow song by the open window, a lark shot up the steep sky in maddest headlong delight. Youth and a conviction of secret unquenchable joy, underlying and vitalising all, throbbed through Grace Dorrien's heart; she returned to her sick sister singing.

CHAPTER IV

Joy returned to the Old House with long June summer days. Laura seemed well, and was happy and merry. The *Invincible* was in dock for repairs; Raymond Garenne at Newcourt; all the youth of Newcourt often at the Old House; or the youth of the Old House at Newcourt. Laura could not dance as much as Grace could; she had never been nearly as active and agile as her sister; nor could she walk, bathe, and be out and about all day; but with care and watchfulness she seemed much like other girls, only more delicate and fragile. Newcourt air did her so much good that Mrs. Dorrien allowed her to pass a fortnight there with her. Grace remained at the Old House with Mursell, an arrangement proposed by herself, and eagerly agreed to by her mother, from what seemed a singular whim of Mrs. Dorrien's—that the Old House must never be left by the whole family at once. Though some other reason was always given, that was known to be the real ground of Grace's remaining at home. Truth to confess, Lady Wotton's invitations to Grace were never too cordial; much as she resented her eldest son's enslavement by his cousin, still more, with curious inconsistency, did she resent his refusal.

'Cousin Emma thinks it is all my fault, mother,' Grace said one day, 'so I will see Wotton as little as possible, and I will never go to Newcourt except by special invitation, and then only occasionally. Very likely I flirted with him at first. I used to flirt generally and impartially, I know. Cousin Emma never cared for me, or I for her. Oh yes; I know she is very good. But it's a kind of goodness I never could bear. I don't know that I ever cared much for good people—except for dear Miss Tattwood.'

'But what in the world is the matter with poor Cousin Emma's goodness?' Laura asked. 'It's not pronounced or aggressive. *I* think her an old dear.'

An enigma these young minds were unable to solve, the solid truth being that the one intolerable thing in average mortals is their goodness; their badness can be endured, their frailties made allowance for; their virtues drive one distracted. Such is human imperfection.

'No, Raymond, I am not fond of Grace Dorrien,' Cousin Emma happened to be saying to her second son. 'Of course, I

am sorry for the poor girl. Clever? Handsome?—h'm, yes. But——'

'But, in short, you can't bear her, mother? Yet she's surely quiet enough now and well behaved enough. I doubt if Wotton will ever get over it. It's one of those deep things that don't often happen—and then only to those quiet, bookish chaps. Of course, we know she hasn't a penny; that's the only thing against her.'

'What of her father? What of those old tales?' Lady Wotton asked with a subtle, half-scornful smile. 'And Geoffrey Harbord is more than singular. Your father always held that Harbord blood was dangerous. There was never a Harbord without a bee in his bonnet. Poor Caroline! Well, one would never be surprised at anything; she talks oddly at times, you know.'

'Mother,' cried the young man, with a rush of colour in his ruddy brown face, 'you don't mean, you can't mean—of course, poor Mrs. Dorrien talks oddly—who wouldn't after all she has gone through? *That* wouldn't be against her descendants.'

'I am not so sure of that, Raymond. It is a risk I should grieve to see incurred by a child of mine. People of healthy brain suffer and keep their senses; the blot comes out under some strain when it is in the blood. Poor children, they are deeply to be pitied! I wish we could do more for them. As it is, one is constantly afraid of giving offence and hurting their feelings.'

'You see, mother,' the young man said, after a few turns in the cool shadows of the beech-tree, under which Lady Wotton sat with some needlework, 'it's no use beating about the bush—but—Laura!'

'Oh, Laura is a darling.'

'I can't live without her, mother. There!' He slipped into a seat at his mother's side, put his arm round her, crushing his curly brown head upon her shoulder like a child. Lady Wotton knew this caress of old; it used to mean asking indulgence in some schoolboy delight. She did not speak for some time, then he looked up, and found that she was crying, and a cold fear struck him.

'I thought you *knew*,' she said then. 'Poor boy! Poor little Laurie!'

He knew that she was ill—consumptive; he had not known that there was no hope of recovery. Many people were consumptive and grew out of it, with care and warm climate, he had heard. His sister, who was married last summer, had been con-

sumptive. She had wintered in Algiers, in Madeira, in Mentone, and had long since grown into a healthy young woman. He had now to learn that there could be no question of marriage for Laura; youth and love revolted, but reason bowed to the inevitable. He was young; his mother felt that this disappointment might not be the worst thing for him, while Laura's early death might be better than any life possible to her. Not of marrying, but dying, and the better life, in which there is no more need of marriage, that poor sweet child must think. The mother hoped there had been no love-talk between them; it would be cruel to wake passion on the verge of the grave.

'No talk,' was the dejected answer, 'but—it isn't *words* that tell.'

Just then, joyously tripping with dancing step, through the wavering shadows, came Evelyn Garenne. Raymond moved off in another direction, head hanging, eyes downward bent, anxious to conceal an emotion that was instantly detected by his sister.

'What is it with Ray, mother?' she asked.

'He had not heard the fatal nature of poor Laura's illness, my dear, and——'

'And they are in love with one another, and have been for years. Poor Raymond! Poor Laura! I thought he knew.'

'I *hope* she does not care for him, Evelyn. He thinks not.'

'Ah, but I *know*,' the sage of nineteen replied. She had the best of reasons for knowing, and looked grave and concerned when her mother bid her beware of suggesting such thoughts to poor little Laura.

Later in that year, when the leaves were changing and thinning, Sir Geoffrey was walking slowly, and with a step of increasing uncertainty, in his sunny rose-garden, where the dial told the sunshiny hours among billows of bloom and leafage. He used a strong walking-cane, and often stopped, always turning to the arcade of lindens, through the golden green roof of which the noonday sun burned with daily softening lustre. His gaze was wistful, his mouth not so firm as it had been. 'The mawster is sore changed,' was the phrase passing through the household.

When he reached the avenue, he clasped his hands on the top of his stick and stood long, looking earnestly along the leafy aisle that was pierced with shafts of sunlight and dappled with swaying shadows. It was empty and silent, save for the rustle of a wayward breeze, the hum of bees, the flight of birds from branch to branch, the movement of insects on the mossy grass.

But Sir Geoffrey saw, with an inward gaze, the flutter of a summer dress, the movement of a graceful young figure beneath the sliding lights; he heard with inward ears the round fresh voice of his child's child, and looked into the lustrous dark eyes, that once brought love, mirth, youth, and beauty to his lonely age. She would never come again—never, never, never. So he said over and over again, till he was bewildered. Why did she come no more, what had they done with her?

Brinson Hythe often pondered over the fascination the linden-walk had for his uncle and over the expectant gaze he saw upon the ageing face. This morning he broke unexpected and unheard upon the old man's reverie. His light footfall scarcely sounded to the dulled hearing of age. Sir Geoffrey started and looked fearfully round when roused by his nephew's question in raised tones—

'What are you looking for, Uncle Geoffrey?'

'What am I looking for?' he echoed slowly, turning as slowly to face his nephew. 'What indeed? I am looking, Brinson, for all I have lost—for youth and beauty, love and joy. All I have lost! All I have lost!'

'Well, well, whatever you have lost, I hope you have at least found an appetite for luncheon,' the nephew returned with ill-veiled impatience, taking the old man's arm and turning him gently round to face the house. 'Tired, eh? Sit a while, then. Will you have it served here, or go indoors for it? It is quite ready,' he added, as the usual strain of music and unearthly sweet song floated out on the sunny air. Sir Geoffrey would go in, he replied; but he remained on the bench, despondent, crouching, with a weary air and bent head. He appeared to forget the luncheon, and lapsed into his former reveries, sometimes shaking his head, sometimes muttering to himself, always oblivious of Brinson's presence.

'I have something you will like here,' Brinson said at last, after long and anxious study of the face before him, tapping his breast-pocket. 'I think you valued the opals you gave poor Grace Dorrien on her birthday?'

Sir Geoffrey looked up in the old keen, masterful way, his bent figure straightening itself out, vibrant with returning vitality.

'What would you say?' he grumbled; 'you ask a fool's question. Should I have given what I did not value?'

Brinson drew a morocco case from his pocket, the lid flew up with a snap; there lay the opal and diamond necklace on its velvet bed. A flickering sunbeam leapt into the opal hearts and

darted back again in many-shivered lustre. Sir Geoffrey went pale; his eyes blazed; his mouth was fierce.

'Where did you get that?' he asked harshly.

'I bought it,' Brinson replied, in a less assured voice. 'I bought it—of Kimberley.'

'It is a lie. Kimberley could not sell Grace Dorrien's property. It is stolen. What fool's work is this?'

'Dear uncle, pray be calm, it is all right,' his nephew returned gently and sweetly; 'Kimberley bought it of a Jewish pawnbroker on Portsmouth Hard.'

'Stolen property!' the old man cried, trembling and paling, yet fierce and hard.

'Not so,' the nephew replied with forced gaiety; 'you remember that Grace was a keen business woman; she always had an eye to the main chance. She knew that Kimberley had set these jewels for you, so she wrote to him some time since to ask their exact value. He told her what he honestly considered they were worth without their setting, and offered, in consideration of long years of custom from you, to take them at that price. She declined the offer. Kimberley, happening to be in Portsmouth in the summer, was amazed to see the necklace for sale in a pawnbroker's window. The Jew asked him a heavy price for it; the setting alone, he said, was worth a good deal. Kimberley told him that he knew its value perfectly, for he had set the jewels himself, and would like to know by what chance they were there. "A young lady in reduced circumstances, the granddaughter of Sir Geoffrey Harbord, had sold them to him," the pawnbroker said. Kimberley bought them on the chance of our taking them —of course, not without a good deal of haggling with the child of Israel—and—here they are!'

The diamonds flashed, the opals throbbed in rhythmic flame, as if from red hearts of anger. Sir Geoffrey took them, held them in the light, and looked long with burning eyes upon them. Then he looked at his nephew, and observed that he was much changed of late. He was balder, his remaining hair was grey, his eyes were colder, his mouth harder. Refinement of feature had become severity, austerity had degenerated into cruelty. There had often been that in his regard before which the old man had trembled; he trembled before it no more, but hated and resented it. He sat erect and defiant, the aged, shrunken look gone, the massive face and strong figure dilated, the fiery eyes blazing with inner fire. 'You have done a damnable thing, Brinson Hythe,' he said slowly and steadily; 'you have done many damnable

things for which, from my inmost soul, I curse you. Why was my granddaughter obliged to steal into my house like a thief?—to steal along under those very lindens, three years ago? Cursed be the hour,' he cried, suddenly springing to his feet, 'when you first saw the light! Cursed be the hour,' he added, dashing the necklace into his nephew's ashen-grey face, 'when you came between me and mine! Cursed——'

The face changed, the voice broke to a gasp, the tall figure, instinct with fiery indignation, suddenly collapsed, like a punctured air-tube, and sank senseless to the earth, where the jewels lay stained with blood from a livid face, that looked down upon the wreck it had made with a ghastly smile.

The same day was sinking in autumnal splendour, when Grace Dorrien, tired and dusty, after a long day in Oldport, sat at the foot of a turf-bank, braided with such down-flowers as marjoram, mint, and balm, with dainty harebells quivering to the breeze, and looked down the steep descent upon a sea on either side coloured by sunset, upon Barling church tower, and upon a blue spiral of smoke that rose from the unseen chimneys of the Old House, giving assurance of home and rest.

Strange that the Old House, in which only one winter and two summers had been passed, seemed more like home than any house in which they had ever lived. Yet it was not even their own, like Belwood and others. Hardwin Hall had shown something of this home charm during her short stay in it, yet how different the houses were. Hardwin, new, immense, full of the splendour of art, of beauty and treasure; Barling, old, small, and ruinous, furnished with scanty remnants and faded wreckage from better days. Though one beloved presence could never be in Barling, had never been there, another and dearer would soon cross that threshold. 'How very soon!' she thought, with throbbing heart and crimsoning face. Soon he would sit here on this thymy turf, delight in this beauty, and breathe the sparkling air. How many church towers one could see at once. St. Ann's new spire to the left, Barling just below, Sandyknowe outlined on its blue belt of sea; far on the cliffs beneath the southern hills, another tower, newly built. Two more inland, and yet another could be seen by just turning back and looking down. She saw it through Mark's eyes; he almost seemed to be there, listening, with his grave smile, to her fancies about the church towers; each a centre of human life, drawing homes to itself, magnet-like, absorbing their sorrows and joys, aspirations and struggles, and bearing them hallowed upwards. Was it wild to think them

Jacob's ladders, carrying ascending and descending angels with winged messages to and fro? She would tell him this fancy. How much she had to tell; how much more to hear. His letters were so short and reticent.

'Mark,' she spoke softly to the solitude, blushing with the sweetness of it; 'dear Mark,' growing bolder in the pleasant silence, while an old sheep with a formal face looked up from his nibbling, just like a precise old gentleman horrified at the indecorum of the rising generation. 'Ah! but I *may* say it, Sir Sheep; I have the right, so nibble away in peace.' A letter from India lay over her heart, unopened. It held the joy of anticipation; it would be waste to open it on this beautiful, busy day; it must be treasured against inevitable dreariness, when Laura was unusually fretful and exacting, her mother querulous and unjust, Mursell cross, the day rainy, some difficulty about butcher's bills arising; then it could be read. It was always a short joy; the writer's style being so laconic and condensed; short but sweet.

When would the donkey-chair, in which Laura had promised to meet her, come in sight? How handy that humble equipage had been the summer long, taking Laura here and there, and giving them all pleasure; that was alone well worth the opals. A sound of hoofs at last, but not a donkey's—the heavy steps of the good Dapple, bearing his master, Mr. Cartmel. The sight of honest Dapple steadily trotting along beneath his homely rider had become a symbol of help and comfort, so often had the cob borne timely help and counsel thus to the Old House. Such a smile as would have made His Grace the Duke of Ormonde, or the Right Honourable Earl Wotton, or Viscount Dover, or many another valiant and worthy gentleman, happy for a week, if not for life, irradiated the face of Miss Grace Dorrien, when she looked into the weather-beaten face of the village doctor, who drew rein, not that Dapple needed the hint, and dismounted.

'Good-evening, Miss Grace. What is the best news in Oldport, hey?'

'Queen's Ann's death, Mr. Cartmel; that's the latest intelligence there, I'm told. I asked for an ice, and heard that December was the earliest time for that treyade. I'm waiting for that wretched sister of mine; she promised to meet me with the donkey-chair.'

'Too late for Miss Laura to be so far from home; the sun will be under in a second. There, it's gone! But it's a long step to Oldport and back, and shopping all day, I suppose. We know what young ladies are when shop-windows tempt. Well,

now, Miss Grace, I 'm afraid—I must tell you, we must be very careful with Miss Laura this winter.'

'She is not so well?—Oh, dear, doctor, how I *wish* we could take her to a warmer climate. I may tell you in confidence—you mustn't even tell my mother——'

'Trust me, Miss Grace, I know everybody's secrets five mile round.'

'There is a chance, even a probability, of taking her to India,' this with a glowing face.

Mr. Cartmel turned sharply and looked over Dapple's back at the sea, which was now turning pink under a pink sky. Grace could only see his back and the back view of his grizzled whiskers beneath his hat. He took a coloured handkerchief from his pocket, used and replaced it, then he turned brusquely round.

'Don't think it; she couldn't stand the heat, much less the voyage,' he said roughly, trying not to see the light fade from the beautiful young face.

'What climate *would* suit her?' she asked, after swallowing down something that threatened to choke her.

'This. Best at home—now,' he said shortly. 'We may pull her through a couple of winters here. I thought I had told you. Keep up, Miss Grace, keep up.'

'I don't *often* give way,' she said, recovering.

'Not often. Good girl, brave girl! But now, Miss Grace, I want to ask you a few questions; you mustn't mind what I say; never be ashamed of anything before the doctor, you know. Doctors have to know everything. Now is there, do you know, any—hm—mental illness in your mother's family? Hush! don't be afraid. Nobody can hear.'

She sprang up with a faint cry; then sat down again, her face bloodless.

'The only thing I ever heard,' she replied after a pause, 'is of a cousin's children—my mother's first cousin—some are idiots.'

'Nothing more? Under the seal of secrecy, you know. I'd rather ask you than Lord Wotton or her Ladyship. You are young for trouble, but you are a sensible girl, and you've a stout heart. Now your grandfather, Sir Geoffrey Harbord, isn't he rather queer—eccentric—peculiar?'

'My grandfather,' she replied slowly, and after a thoughtful pause, 'is a remarkably clever, accomplished, and well-read man, of very decided character and arbitrary disposition. He is an admirable musician; he paints well enough to be a professional artist; he is an acknowledged connoisseur. His great place,

Hardwin Hall, is full of treasures of art, books and curiosities, collected by himself. Hardwin, which he built almost entirely from his own plans, is itself a work of art. His intellect is of the finest order; if he is peculiar, it is only because, like Saul, he is a head and shoulders taller than other people. He is much thought of as a practical thinker—upon the county bench, in all local public matters. All who know him regret that he never made a career in politics, public life. He is a kind-hearted, generous, and just man. His lifelong quarrel with my mother is the work of a treacherous busybody and go-between.'

Mr. Cartmel thanked her, reflected, and drew his own conclusions. He then asked Mrs. Dorrien's exact age and Grace's, and pondered over that, anxiety visible in his face. How could he put such a burden on shoulders so young? Yet upon whose if not on hers?

'Mrs. Dorrien is *not well*,' he said slowly at last. They were descending the steep down in the after-glow, walking heedfully over the flinty water-scored chalk; Dapple on the doctor's right, carefully picking his steps. Grace uttered a short cry, stopped dead, and clutched Mr. Cartmel's arm fiercely. He said nothing; quiet Dapple, so suddenly brought-to, slipped, snorted, and recovered himself slowly. Mr. Cartmel looked at the white face at his side, the fierce clutch unrelaxed on his arm, the eyes staring fixedly into vacancy, the young red mouth drawn in horror and pain, the body rigid. He wished he had not told her; but it was too late now. Presently the clutching fingers relaxed, leaving purple marks he showed his wife afterwards, the rigid body trembled, a hoarse voice gasped—

'It is *not true*. She is *quite well*. She eats——'

'But does not sleep. Come, my dear Miss Grace, I'm a stupid old fool; I frightened you by all those blundering questions. We are all unhinged at times, you know. Then we don't sleep. We *must sleep* to live. It's only a question of a stitch in time. Mrs. Dorrien has seen trouble—a power of trouble, poor lady! Her daughter's illness is too much for her nerves, that's all. Mrs. Dorrien is irritable; she can't control herself—why? Because she gets too little sleep and no mental repose. We must *bear with her*. Never answer her back, never contradict, spare her every possible worry, get her to rest and sleep. Persuade her to take a nerve-tonic I'm going to send her; we mustn't call it a sleeping draught. But when the eyes are too bright and the sleep is lost, she *must have it*. She needs care, that's all. No danger with care. Try to get Miss Laurie to

spare her mother. Invalids are apt to be exacting. Happier days will come, my dear; there'll be wedding bells some day, hey? It's a sad life for a young girl fit for all sorts of pleasures and junketings. Duty's a hard word sometimes. I often tell my daughters to copy somebody at the Old House. And they're not bad girls. All depends on you at home, Miss Grace. Even Mrs. Mursell, good soul. You are the apple of her eye.'

She listened, only half heeding, with a wan smile and weary face.

When they reached the end of the steep lane, he bade her good-night, mounted Dapple, and trotted sedately away towards the marsh meadows in the purple twilight. She watched the familiar figure disappear in the dusk of overhanging hedgerow, and paused a little, stunned and stupefied, before she turned to the Old House, where the withdrawing-room window glowed warmly among thick-coming shadows with a welcome and a hope she feared to meet.

How long was it since she sat happy and hopeful on the flowery bank in sunshine, not hearing the swift steps of the fate that was to shatter her world and plunge her in shadow her whole life long?

CHAPTER V

SILENCE in the Old House; silence, and such heavy gloom as thick stone walls, impregnated with centuries of human sighs, alone can make. The door, being on the latch, opened easily, disclosing a gulf of blackness, into which Grace descended, shutting the door and entombing herself in empty gloom. She saw a faint gleam from a tallow dip in the hall, then a dark staircase, with a deadly fear of she knew not what clutching at her heart. Vague horror of the tragedy overshadowing them made it almost impossible to face her mother; she lingered, calling 'Mursie' repeatedly in a low voice, and receiving no answer, before she ventured to brave the dark staircase and win her way, trembling, to the drawing-room door.

She paused in the act of opening it in an access of new dread. For what meant this trembling, these weird terrors—to one who had never known fear, neither nervous weakness? Sick and white, she paused, shuddering to think of their deadly heritage. Laura was *safe*, Laura only, Laura, the object of so much pity. When courage was at last found to open the door, it

was a shock to see the peaceful scene disclosed—the warm hearth, ruddy firelight leaping on the white-and-gold wainscot, shrouded harp and closed harpsichord, the comely mother and comelier daughter, sitting in the friendly warmth, a picture of commonplace comfort—no terror, no tragedy there.

'What, Grace? At last?' Mrs. Dorrien began querulously. 'Where *have* you been all this long time? And this poor child wearying and waiting for her tea?'

'I do wish you would sometimes think of other people, Jack,' Laura fretted; 'the tea was spoilt, and I wanted those silks to use this afternoon.'

Grace sank into a chair with an impatient exclamation.

'It was I who had to wait, I who ought to complain if anybody,' she said. 'Why did nobody come to meet me as we agreed?'

It was a miserable, humiliating scene, of petty weaknesses and petty pains, of irritations, reproaches, and retorts, whence Grace, overwrought and maddened, rushed, despairing. It is possible to sacrifice oneself, to practise lifelong heroism for the sake of people whose foibles one cannot put up with for ten minutes. It is far easier to face the scaffold and the stake than to endure the daily rack and thumbscrew of domestic irritation, one often thinks.

No one knew what passed behind the locked door of Grace's room that night; towards dawn she fell asleep; when the Sunday church-bells were ringing, she was still fast asleep, her mother standing by the bed in the sunshine, in fear and amazement.

'Dinna wake the poor lassie,' Mursell whispered; 'she fasted the dee long; she's fair and tired out.'

'So long to sleep,' Mrs. Dorrien whispered back, looking at the young, still face on the pillow, and wondering at the pallor and weariness of it, and the sadness of the closed eyes and drooping mouth, that scarcely seemed to breathe in its stillness, until presently the lips parted with a moan, and the sleeper, turning as if away from some terror, flung her arms abroad and woke with a start and cry, to see the two anxious faces regarding her.

'What is the matter?' she asked, pushing back the heavy waves of hair and sitting up, dazed and drowsy.

'You slept so long,' her mother replied, 'I was afraid. Oh, Grace, if *you* are ill, if *you* fail us, what *shall* we do? You were always so strong.'

The shadows of sleep went out of the great dark eyes; they

gazed with a singular expression in their steady lustre on the mother's worn face and shaking hands.

'Never fear, mother,' she said, after a space, 'I shall never fail you—never.'

Later on, in the drowsy, sunny afternoon, she wandered away through the garden and over a stile that led on to the lonely down. How still and restful it was in the fading of the golden year. What wonderful Sabbath peace lay upon field and farm and blue hushed sea. This exquisite Sunday calm comes only in the country, where it lies like a benediction upon woods and fields; the very flocks and herds seem conscious of the unusual quiet, and drink from it as from a river. Wondering at the peace without, all the earth silent and holy, like some vast temple where Nature was at speechless prayer, but wondering more at the peace passing all understanding within her weary young heart, Grace sank at the foot of a weather-beaten beech, the writhen mossed roots of which made a rustic arm-chair. She had taken her resolution; her life—so interminably long at twenty-three—lay mapped out before her, grey and sunless, lit by lurid storm-gleams; yet her heart was at peace, tired, almost exhausted, but strangely uplifted. Down there in hoary village churches, country people were reading evening psalms in the cool gloom; a prayer-book was open in her hand; her eyes perused the soothing, uplifting words. Mark would never know her childish fancies about the village churches now.

The morning's post had brought a letter from Marian Alford that chimed curiously with Mark's own letter from India, almost as if the brother and sister had planned their letters together—a manifest impossibility—chiming still more curiously with events, with that terror the doctor hinted at, and with Laura's hopeless disease and rapidly shortening days. Grief had indeed become 'a solemn scorn of ills.'

But, Mark, how could you write with that cold brevity? Was it indeed from chilled, outworn feeling, or was it only the stern, terse, soldier style, or haply the too great security of what you supposed long since won and your own for ever?

'It is not necessary,' the letter ran, 'to tell you what you accepted long ago in accepting the little cross; the question now is, can you come out to me? Tell me to come for you, and I come. But, in returning to England during the next two years, I ruin my career. Another two years' waiting is out of the question. Weigh well, before you reply, what it is to be a soldier's wife. Consider the pains and perils of exile; think whether

your heart is stout enough for such a life. We have long been loyal to an unspoken trust. But such waiting is weary work. Once you have decided, either way, dearest, end my suspense without further delay.'

'He is loyal,' she thought, 'but weary. His loyalty is a burden to him.'

That was over-night. The morning brought Mrs. Alford's letter, which began in the light strain of casual correspondence. Then it alluded to Mark's changed prospects, his rapid promotion and important staff appointments, the probability of his being charged with this military mission to a semi-savage Eastern potentate, the almost impossibility of his coming home.

'Do not play any more with Mark's happiness,' it continued; 'end this long waiting, I implore you. You have kept him three years in suspense; it is most important from every point of view that he should marry as soon as possible. I hope, dear Grace, that you will be his wife; I should gladly welcome you as a sister. But I shall console myself, if you refuse him, with the reflection that some one he is daily meeting, and who is absolutely devoted to him, will be of the greatest advantage to him in his profession and in every worldly way. And she is a very sweet and noble woman, though she is not—Grace. Only let me beseech you, dear, to end his suspense. If you love him—as I have always hoped—take him; if not, set him free. Do not play with his happiness or spoil his prospects. Pardon the liberty I take. He is my only brother; his happiness is very dear to me.'

Resting under the beech, through which a light sea-breeze rustled from time to time, she thought over the answer to the Indian letter. Its substance had quickly been decided during the cruel pain of the night; the phrases had to be coined and chosen. There are those who decide irrevocably and have peace, and those who go back again and again, questioning and discussing the weary pros and cons of their decisions,—these have great torment. Once for all, for good or for ill, Grace had decided; torment and discussion went before, peace followed; she would never alter.

'My Friend,' she pencilled beneath the yellowing beech,—'There was no tacit acceptance. I thought it was Laura until long after we came to Barling. I am deeply touched by an honour of which I am quite unworthy. The remembrance of our friendship will be a lifelong happiness. Those days by the Mediterranean were the happiest I ever spent. Had circum-

stances brought further and more intimate acquaintance, one scarcely knows what might have been the sequel. And, if hopes impossible to fulfil have been innocently raised, forgive one who was herself misled and mistaken. Here is rosemary.—All good wishes for your success and welfare from your true friend,

'GRACE DORRIEN.'

Some drops fell from the writer's eyes; a robin's song seemed to express saddest, sad farewell in its penetrating pathos; the beech boughs shivered their sere red leafage in sympathy above the bent head; the church clock chimed on the quiet air.

She rose and went back, followed by Duke, the collie, long couched at her feet with his muzzle on his forepaws, his winking gaze from time to time upon her.

Of peaches ripened on the sunny garden wall, she plucked some, and laid them in green leaves in a tiny basket, then some bursting figs, growing near. Here a wasp had made free with one of the ruddiest peaches, and she ate the remnant, the juice spirting out over her gown, and remembered the Hardwin peaches by the rose-garden and sundial. The Old House dial would be a little before that at Hardwin; Cousin Brimstone would know the difference to a second. Grannie had no one to scold for staining fingers with peach juice now.

Then she went into the kitchen, dark with leafage outside and heavy oak beams within. Mursell was gone to church; she would come home hot and tired from her long dusty walk. Grace put on a kettle, set the drawing-room tea-board, garnished it with fresh fruit, and cut thin bread and butter. Then she smiled as she bethought her to set tea for Mursie too, and garnish that with odorous fruit. 'Who could be all unhappy with three people's burdens to lighten?' So she thought, as she lifted the boiling kettle and poured it on the tea, picturing Mursell's pleasure and refreshment when she came in. Again she smiled, when she opened the drawing-room door to find Mrs. Dorrien just returned from church, and Laura beginning to lament having to await Mursell's slow return and slower bringing of tea.

'Here it is, Miss Impatient; but where is your precious grievance?' she asked with her old gaiety. These things were henceforth to be her joys—poor trivialities, ministering to small physical needs; still, a cup of cold water is not without praise from the most august quarter. Her mother scolded her for playing the waiting-maid, yet drank the tea with unequivocal satisfaction; Laura, sipping hers, bewailed her sentence of imprisonment for the winter, with self-pity sweeter than tea.

In spite of that imprisonment and utmost care, Laura faded visibly from week to week, as autumn passed and winter wore on, the poor mother always looking forward to spring, when the cough would go and the fresh air give strength. Laura's nerves were now affected; she displayed an irritation and unevenness of temper unusual, the doctor said, in that malady. She needed quiet and solitude; she would pass hours alone in her bedroom, suffering from headaches that made sound intolerable, and allowing no one to be anywhere near the room, to her mother's deep disquiet. But the doctor bade them let her have her will. If she wanted anything, she could touch the musical contrivance Mr. Garenne had provided to that end.

'These headaches are very strange,' Grace said once to Mr. Attwood, who had called in his priestly capacity, and been denied access to the patient—'singularly refreshing ailments; they actually brighten her up. They stop suddenly, and out she comes as gay as a lark, and is the life of the whole house.'

'Very singular, Miss Gracie, very singular,' he returned, bending his owl and cherub glance upon her with an inscrutable expression, that veiled some shrewd suspicions. 'The ways of women from immemorial days have been singular—in sickness as in health.'

'I shall tell Mrs. Attwood if you talk like that. And I won't learn Greek any more.'

'A dreadful threat, dear Miss Grace. Miss Attwood says I live on the Greek lessons, but I like a little mutton as well. I will come to-morrow to see Miss Laura.'

But on the morrow Miss Laura needed priestly aid of quite another kind.

'Something very queer at the Old House, Miss Attwood, my dear,' the rector observed at dinner that evening; 'I saw the lights in the ruins again.'

'Dear heart alive, Miss Tattwood! Then our sweet child's time is come,' she replied solemnly; 'the lights forebode death.'

'Miss Attwood, my dear, to believe in ghost-lights is to hazard incurring the sin of witchcraft. No doubt there is a simple cause for these phenomena analogous to that of Will-o'-the-Wisp or Jack-o'-Lantern.'

'Pray Heaven it be so, Miss Tattwood,' returned the little ladybird, using the formula beneath which she covered profound disbelief in her husband's theories.

A Christmas moon rode clear through a cold sky that night, it being about the turn of the year. Laura's window was shuttered

and curtained warmly against the cold. When Mursell answered the musical summons at nine, she found the room dark, save for the feeble glow of a dying fire, from which the pillows were carefully shaded. A faint voice from the bed asked her to be very quiet and make up the fire for the night, as the patient felt sleep approaching. This was done, a soft 'Good-night' spoken, the door carefully closed and curtained, and a report carried to the drawing-room.

'It's small wonder Miss Laura loses her sleep and takes headache with they lights and noises near by in the ruins,' Mursell said in conclusion. 'Indeed, mem, will ye no persuade Missie to try another room?'

'It would be well,' mother and daughter agreed; then they sat over the fire planning other arrangements. Their conversation at this time consisted mainly of such planning. So deeply preoccupied was Mrs. Dorrien with Laura's illness, that she had scarcely grasped the significance of Mark Hilton's deferred return to England, and subsequent silence, nor had she been much affected by the intelligence in a north-country paper of Sir Geoffrey's seizure in the early autumn.

Towards morning a strong wind rose, and shrieked and howled vindictively round the Old House. Mursell, wakeful and much disquieted by some remarks Mr. Attwood let fall, when she opened the door on his departure, upon the ghost-lights in the ruins and the undesirableness of Laura's sleeping so near them, distinguished amongst other sounds the unmistakable banging of a door. She got up, took a candle, and went in stocking feet towards the reiterated sound—a slow, dragging, creaking noise, followed by a crash, intermittent, but always the same. Her heart was in her mouth; she crossed herself and said silent prayers all the way; the sound was horrid, suggestive of everything appalling—a corpse dragged along, a murderer struck down, burglary, a hand-to-hand struggle between desperate people. Yet Mursell was firmly convinced that it was a solid wooden door banging against a solid wooden post by no ghostly agency; further, that the sound was near Laura's room, and would disturb her; still further, that it might be in the ruins, in which, as Mr. Attwood had pointed out, tramps, gipsies, or thieves might be sheltering, and respecting the security of which he had promised to speak to the policeman on his way home—which he did, finding him ill in bed. Few could guess the heroism animating Mursell's devoted breast that night. The moon was long set, dark clouds rolled rapidly up upon the wind, the night was black

as pitch; Mursell's tallow-dip flickered in strong draughts rushing along the empty corridors; more than once she was on the point of flying back to her bed.

At last she gained the corridor outside Laura's closed and curtained door; the wind had lulled; there was neither sound nor sight unusual. Laura's room was at the end of the passage, which was panelled in dark oak, and bare of decoration except for a few oil portraits. A full-length warrior in a Jacobean ruff occupied a panel at right angles to Laura's door, which he seemed to be guarding; his right hand pointed to her door, his left was on his sword-hilt, his grim face watched all her exits and entrances. Grace cherished many fancies about him. 'Death himself,' she thought, 'would scarcely dare pass that stern sentinel.'

All was as usual, Mursell was thinking, when, with a shriek and a wail of rising wind, the dragging sound began again; then the grim warrior, always pointing to the door, advanced slowly but surely towards Mursell, whose candle went out with the wind rush, and who fell with a stifled shriek to the floor, just as the crash again resounded. She had a stout heart; she was more frightened than any coward could be. After lying still a few moments, and finding herself still alive, she set her teeth and prepared to do battle to whatever foe of spirit or flesh should appear. Rising to her feet, candle in shaking hand, she struck a match, lighted it, and looked defiantly before her, to find that the warrior had retreated, not indeed to his usual station, but very near it. Carefully shading her light, she approached the armoured man, touched his thick gold frame, and found that it concealed a lock, to which he was always pointing, and that the picture was in reality a door admitting to the ruins. She shut it firmly, after one hasty glance into an arras-hung room, furnished with heavy oaken chairs and an ancient worm-eaten table, on which she was surprised to see a familiar candlestick, but no candle. Listening long in trembling excitement at Laura's door, she heard no sound, but the tinkle of cinders from the banked-up fire; then, softly opening and softly speaking, she received no answer. Laura always slept heavily after headaches; no doubt she had taken the anodyne drops kept at hand for the purpose. Extinguishing her light, Mursell slipped softly inside, turned the key, and lay in front of the door, pulling a sheepskin rug over her. The wind shrieked, wailed, and piped, but that drag and crash were no more heard; the sleeper was very still, the fire smouldering beneath the banked slack rustled and tinkled. Mursell fell fast asleep in a few minutes, exhausted by her fears.

The reiterated ringing of a door-bell by little Sally, the maid who came to help her, roused Mursell late next morning, to find the winter day broken, though it was still dark in the curtained chamber. Slipping softly from the room, she let Sally in, hastily dressed, and went back to make up Laura's fire and let in the daylight as usual, having done which, she turned to the bed. But what did Mursell see there to make her heart stand still on a sudden? Nothing. The bed was empty and cold, though disarranged, as if from recent use.

She could never remember what happened after this until she found herself in Grace's room, saying in a curious voice unlike her own that she feared Miss Laura had been walking in her sleep, as she was not in her room.

'Dear Mursie, don't talk nonsense, you've been dreaming,' her young lady retorted, rapidly completing her toilette; 'Laura is far too weak even to walk upstairs. She may be gone into mother's room—not farther, little nuisance! You've had nightmare, Mursie, and not shaken it off. So the grim old Earl stepped out of his frame, did he? Oh, Mursie dear, fie! fie!'

But Laura was not in her mother's room, nor could they find her in any corner of the Old House. The secret door was shut; the warrior, guarding it, stood immovable in his ruff.

'Eh, dear, Miss Greecie, I misdoubt I shut her in!' cried Mursell in an agony of despair.

'We'll go round to the other side and search the ruins and make sure quickly,' Grace said. 'Don't frighten mother. Why, where is the key?'

Not in its place certainly, a fact that made many surmises clear verities to Grace, as she ran quickly round to the courtyard on which stables and offices, as well as a portion of the ruins, opened. Here they perceived fresh wheel-marks, an open stable door in which horses had recently been, the door of the ruins, with its key in the lock. Going in, they found all as usual till they climbed the broken staircase, on which miry boots had left marks, and whence dust had been swept by trailing skirts. A large gap in the floor of the landing was shown by a small oil lamp on its edge, with its wick smouldering and smoking; it had no doubt burnt all night and exhausted the oil. A door, supposed to be permanently nailed up, stood open, admitting to a room unknown to Grace and Mursell, containing a hammock recently used, a lounging-chair, fuel, books, wine, cards, recent newspapers, and the ashes of an extinct fire on the hearth. The odour of stale cigar-smoke brought Mursell's heart to her mouth.

Grace, with a singular smile, pronounced two words, 'Raymond Garenne,' as sole comment on Mursell's fear of gipsies, burglars, and body-snatchers.

Another room was found still more comfortably arranged, with sofa, easy-chairs, carpets, and shutters; its high, old-fashioned grate yet retained the warm embers of a coal fire. This opened into a chamber that proved to be the secret room discovered in the night by Mursell. Here, after some fumbling and guess-work, they found the spring-lock; the panel, on this side hidden by faded arras, flew open at a touch, the lock having been carefully oiled and lately in constant use, and revealed the familiar corridor, the scene of Mursell's midnight terrors and valour.

'Are we much wiser for our journey, Mursie?' Grace asked, pushing the warrior back to his accustomed post by the door.

'Eh, dear, Miss Greecie, if we're no wiser, we're sadder,' she replied. 'I'm feared, I'm sore feared for Miss Laurie, and the night that wild, and she that tender and guarded. And how we'll tell the mistress, poor dear. And me to shut the poor yoong leddy out of her own chamber the night. Eh, Missie dear, what can ye make of it all at all?'

But Grace had suddenly turned and entered Laura's room, erect in the centre of which stood Mrs. Dorrien, stately, statuesque, stonily still. The wintry sunlight touched the tall black figure in the widow's cap, and gave the chill white face a chiller look.

'Mother,' Grace asked, 'what is it? Oh, what is it? Why do you look like that?'

The fixed glassy gaze of the cold, stern eyes altered, the hard-set mouth moved; her mother turned upon Grace, holding an open letter towards her, and asked in a low, fierce voice—

'Were you privy to this?'

'Before Heaven, mother dear, I know nothing, except that Laura cannot be found. Oh, mother, don't look like that——' she cried, taking the letter that Mrs. Dorrien had found on the table by the empty bed, addressed to herself, and had read to the echo of another letter written from child to parent a quarter of a century ago.

They were to be married at Southampton at eight o'clock that morning, and proceed thence at nine to Havre, thence across France to the Mediterranean to the squadron, which included Raymond's ship. Forgiveness was asked. They could not live apart; they knew it was futile to contend against the opposition of both families. A warm winter would restore Laura's strength; all would be well. Such was the purport of this astounding missive.

'And I gave up Mark, my own Mark,' Grace said to herself, as she raised her eyes to her mother's face, which had changed to a grey-white, with quivering lips and haggard eyes. Mrs. Dorrien took back the letter absently with a shaking hand.

'I am childless,' she said, drearily staring before her.

'Oh, mother,' Grace cried, 'you have me.'

'Quite shorn, nothing left, nothing, nothing,' she repeated over and over again; 'nothing left now.'

'Shall I go away too then?' Grace asked, crying. 'Am I nothing?' she sobbed.

'Miss Carrie, dear, where is Miss Laurie?' Mursell asked gently. 'Do ye no ken at all?'

'Miss Laura is dead, Mursell,' she replied. 'Be good enough to draw the blinds down. Send to the sexton, and desire him to toll the knell. Laura Dorrien is no more.'

So she repeated with a stony insistence, against which remonstrance availed nothing.

'Send for Mr. Cartmel,' Grace whispered to Mursell, as the tall oaken clock on the stairs whirred its warning and slowly struck nine, and Laura Garenne, warmly wrapped in furs, sat in a sheltered nook of the Havre packet with her husband, and saw the shore recede from her, with sudden tears, and the conviction that she would see it no more.

The hour struck on many bells at Hardwin Hall, ending in the deep far-sounding boom of the clock in the great central tower. Sir Geoffrey heard it in his bed, and listened for the last boom to eddy into silence. Stricken with paralysis and bed-ridden since his passion in the linden-walk in the autumn, he was slowly regaining power and some degree of mental clearness. He had passed a quiet night, his day nurse had given him his breakfast and left him, at the doctor's suggestion, since he was so much better, for a day's holiday. A housemaid entered the room as usual at that hour; but not at all as usual, she found the patient alone; and less than ever as usual, he was beckoning to her. She at once dropped her brushes and approached the bed, the valet being in an adjoining room with an open door, Mrs. Hythe-Harbord in another adjoining room.

'Shut it,' Sir Geoffrey said in a low, hoarse voice, pointing with his unparalysed hand to the door, and she quickly obeyed and returned.

'Send for my daughter, for Mrs. Clarence Dorrien,' he said in the hoarse, strained voice they all knew now, painfully and with

difficult articulation. 'Do it secretly. Write—if you can—write. Mrs. Clarence Dorrien, Old House, Barling. All here in conspiracy to prevent it. To come at once to her dying father.'

The girl wrote quickly at a writing-table, and read, in a clear low voice, what she had written and directed, to the old man, who listened, smiled, and sank back on his pillow, just as the door opened and the valet returned. The girl quickly crushed the paper in her hand and plunged it in her pocket, then stood with clasped hands gazing before her. The valet angrily asked what she was doing, idling there.

'Eh, Mr. Lytham, 'tis no harm,' she replied in a low voice. 'Th' ode mawster sleeps fine; I couldn't but look at him.'

'He sleeps well indeed,' the old servant exclaimed in an awed voice, approaching the pillow, upon which the fine grey head rested with closed eyes and peaceful face.

END OF PART II

PART III

A.D. 188- -189-

'—— love is flower-like,
Friendship is a sheltering tree.'

CHAPTER I

MAURICE BERTRAM, standing outside the Old House, fearful to knock at the door and break the spell of golden memory that had invested it with such enduring charm, was still as ignorant of the tragedy of the lives within it as in his childish days. The longer he looked and mused, the more he feared to touch all that delicate fabric of memory and reverie, lest it should fall to dust. 'Better far to leave it, a possession and a joy for ever,' he thought; so he turned away from it with a sigh.

At twenty odd, one has so many disillusions, such rooted disbelief in anything surviving the shipwreck of childhood, such profound unconsciousness of enthusiasms and credences yet to be built up on more lasting foundations, that one would fain keep every corner of any fool's paradise in which to nestle and hide from a world of hard fact and crude theory. So he turned from the Old House and strolled down Barling street, grass-grown still, and even quieter than of yore, in spite of the villa growth round it and the fussy little trains that hissed daily past it, casting human flotsam upon its platform at one time, and washing such sea-drift away again at another.

So he turned into the sanded bar parlour of the *Eight Bells* in the lengthening sunbeams, and asked for a pint of ale, which was brought in a brown jug with a foaming head upon it by the landlady herself, with a pleased smile for the tall young gentleman in the knickerbocker suit, with its neat finish of Norfolk jacket, cap, and gaiters.

'Mrs. Dove herself,' the blonde young man said, taking his ale, doffing his cap, and drinking. 'Here is to your continued health and wealth, Mrs. Dove. You 're not a day older than you used to be.'

'You 've the advantage of me, sir. I don't sim to mind ye.'

'It is twenty years since I was here, Mrs. Dove. Barling is changed since then. So am I—I was only seven. I had an uncle here at the Rectory—Mr. Parker.'

'Dear heart alive! and you to mind me all these years, and you no higher than six penneth o' hapence. The rector had boys of his own—a noisy lot they was, to be sure. You'll find changes, sir, sure enough. Mr. Cartmel, he's left, getting in years though, poor gentleman. He never gets up a' nights now. Mr. Ralph, he does that. And Mr. Jem, the youngest of all, he's coming on; pretty nigh finished learning his doctoring. There have been changes at the Rectory. This yer rector is terrible new-fangled, with candles and vlowers and things, and church a week days pretty nigh the same as Sundays.'

'Any ghosts left? At the Old House, for instance?'

'Well there, sir! Did you ever go inside of Old House? Terrible queer doos there. Some says it is ghostes. They med say what they wooll, Miss Dorrien's a good ooman. Terrible poor they be—poor and proud. Never visits noowhere. But if anybody has trouble, trust they to go and tell Miss Dorrien. Mrs. Dorrien, she'll curse and swear at volk like a good 'un. Mrs. Mursell, d'ye mind she? She've ben a bed-lyer this two year. Married Jabez Barnes as kep the *Bugle*, twenty year ago. You mind the *Bugle*, where the coaches used to stop and drop the mails. D'ye mind Chip the carrier? He done the gairden at Old House, and his vather avore 'en. He'd tell ye some tales if he'd a mind to. But he's close, terrible close, is wold Chip. They never lets nobody into the house. His lordship comes over, and Lady Wotton, she comes, they're some sart of cousins. There was another Miss Dorrien—avore your time. Terrible queer doos with she. Some say she was carried off by night by—there! anybody don't like to think of it—by them as make the noises. She was ill abed in a decline, and one mornen, they looked into the bed, and she was gone, clean gone, and never yeard of no more. Volk do say things. Lord Wotton, he made up a long tale. Some say she run away with young Mr. Garenne. But Mr. Cartmel know'd better; he'd give her up long before. But he never said nothen. Close he was, close as wax. And you'd like a bed, sir? And what would ye be pleased to arder for supper?'

The sun was setting when Bertram once more took heart of grace and knocked at the door, against which he had been kicked so long ago. A middle-aged woman came from some remote regions in answer to the knock, and looked suspiciously at the visitor, up and down and all over him.

'They never sees strangers,' she said, hesitating, taking his card and turning it over and over. 'There's tramps about. I'll

take up the bit o' caird if you'll bide outside. These here tramps and thieves dresses up smeart enough,' she added, with a disparaging glance at the visitor's attire.

After some delay the door was again opened with the message, 'You can come in,' and Bertram found himself again under the depreciating gaze of Henry the Eighth and the Tudor lady, whence he followed his guide through the well-known hall up the oak staircase. The same singular faint scent pervaded the house, each portion of which he remembered by a slightly different fragrance; on the staircase turpentine and beeswax prevailed. His steps sounded too loud on the shining uncarpeted stairs; they seemed to wake long-slumbering echoes all over the empty house, these echoes multiplied and separated, rolling away into distance in dying murmurs till the door of the white-and-gold withdrawing-room was opened, disclosing a glory of purple afterglow, the sun having but just dipped below the hills. With this light on his bronzed fair face, the young man appeared on the threshold, a little dazed and very wistful.

'Little Maurice Bertram?' said a woman's vibrating voice, and then, his eyes becoming used to the light, he discerned the friend of his childhood—a tall figure, clothed in some dark, simply-fashioned gown. The dark eyes were softly lustrous, yet with a smouldering fire in their depths, the face was beautiful, the heavy hair slightly silvered and simply braided, the hand extended in welcome, strong, yet slender, and somewhat large. Maurice bent and kissed it, just as he had done twenty years ago; then he looked up with an eager, boyish smile.

'Dear Miss Dorrien, how kind, how good, to remember the solitary boy you made so happy!' he said—'more happy than ever before or after in all his life.'

'It is sad to think that,' the full voice replied; 'it tells of a sorrowful childhood.'

'Well, it was rather a rough business. Some people are brought up, some tumble up, some are dragged up—I was knocked up. The room is not changed. I was afraid it might have been a dream and vanish at a touch. But it's even more like itself than I remembered. And you, you are quite the same, only more so. And——' suddenly aware of the presence of Mrs. Dorrien, sitting with bent head and folded hands in a deep chair, he broke off.

'My mother is a little deaf; she dozes much now. *She* is older. Mother dear, this is Mr. Bertram, little Maurice Bertram,' she added in a raised voice, as the aged head was lifted and the *eyes opened* upon the stranger, whose youth and manhood

seemed to fill the faded room, sending currents of latent, stilled life thrilling through it.

'Eh? Eh?' she asked, in the thinned voice of age, her eyes meeting his frank blue ones and seeing the afterglow through his fair hair. 'To be sure. Hilton, Mark Hilton, come at last, at last,' she repeated, mournfully shaking her grey head. 'At last, Grace, at last.'

'She sometimes confuses people together,' her daughter explained, leaving her to doze again. 'She is thinking of one long absent, one who was young long before you were born.'

'I could find my way all over the house,' he said, the young sound of his voice setting the hushed air a-quiver, as it circled into every corner, waking plaintive echoes among the ancient things he remembered. 'The blessed old clock is striking; it used to tick so loud at night and so low by day. The walnut-trees are there—I hear fairy tales whenever I smell walnut leaves; there is the sundial—I could almost sing the songs. And the "Guards" waltz—do you still play it, Miss Dorrien? Ah! something new at last.'

'Something very new,' she thought—'young life, fresh manhood, new hope, new possibilities, new everything.' Shut up so long with age and sorrow, shadows and sickness, old memories and old fears, this irruption of virile youth and strength was like a plunge in the fountain of life. 'Something new?' she echoed.

He pointed to a golden cup of antique shape, with a tall stem, set with rubies. 'Oh, that is old, very old. It is a long story. It had been buried many years. But tell me of yourself. We sadly missed you when the cruel cousins drove you away. We heard that you were well with others.'

Then she heard that he fared even worse than at the Rectory with the next cousins. There was one girl older than himself, and others younger, running down to a babe in arms, the uncle at sea, the aunt of a stern, narrow, religious sect; these made a less congenial circle for him than even the noisy young ruffians who bullied him, but let him join in their sports. In this grim aunt's household noise was sin; a strict governess exacted stillness in the schoolroom, whence there was no escape, and where there was nothing to do. There he was punished for talking to himself, for asking questions, for tumbling down, for standing up when he should sit, for sitting when he should stand, for whistling on Sundays, for sleeping in church, for sighing at prayers, for wearing out clothes, for not confessing imaginary sins. If anything was upset or broken, it was, 'Cousin Maurice did it.' If they giggled, 'Cousin Maurice made me.' He was punished for

kissing the cat and for telling fairy tales. Strange punishments—bread and water for a week, standing on a stool for a day, wearing cards inscribed 'Liar' in the street, kneeling at meals. A winter night alone in a cellar with chilblains and rats had been even less agreeable than the vigil on the Rectory roof. From this house of restraint and weariness to Christ's Hospital was a welcome change; there the Parker cousins' training bore good fruit.

'No holidays at Christ's Hospital?' he was asked.

'Holidays enough, but spent at school,' she heard. 'My fault. I didn't get on with the girl cousins. I was a general nuisance. Indeed, I wish I had written to you. I did once or twice. But "Miss Dorrien, Old House," was the address. Getting no answer must have been a discouragement. And my uncle left before I went to Christ's Hospital.'

Miss Dorrien listened attentively, yet with a certain abstraction in her dark liquid gaze, of which he was conscious without being discouraged. The shadows gathered heavily, no lights came; Mrs. Dorrien woke, fretted, and dozed off again. Bertram rose reluctantly to go.

'Are you staying long? Will you come again?' he was asked.

'Oh, may I? That I will,' was the eager reply.

So the next afternoon brought him, and found the two ladies under the walnut trees, whose leaves, rustling in the summer breeze, repeated the fairy tales of childhood in Bertram's ears. He brought some trout fresh caught, shining on a cool bed of grass; they had travelled six miles on a bicycle with him.

'These bicycles! Ridden by ladies, young girls! Mother dear, what would you have done to me mounted on two wheels?' Miss Dorrien asked. 'How different *our* girlhood was, Mr. Bertram, you can scarcely imagine. So restricted and prim,' she said, smiling to herself at the memory of a dancer on Southsea Common.

Memory seemed the most solid thing in the Old House, Bertram observed; Miss Dorrien spoke in the present with a perpetual consciousness of the past; he was always surprising reflected lights in the large liquid gaze that met his, shadows of hidden meaning in her spoken words. These ladies seemed to live in a quiet, tree-shadowed back-water, untroubled by the swift onrush of the river of life; it was pleasant and restful to one in the full current and flow, a cool contrast to the heat and turmoil of his masculine youth. Mrs. Dorrien welcomed him gladly to-day.

'Geoffrey,' she said, 'young Sir Geoffrey grown a man, come to his own at last.' Yet she spoke collectedly and with a gentle thoughtfulness that surprised him. Grace wondered if she *might be thinking* of Laura's child, another Geoffrey, only born

to die, and motherless from his birth. The dial marked the passing hour, bees hummed in the golden stillness of summer afternoon, Mrs. Dorrien was dressed in the same fashion as when she told fairy tales to his wondering boyhood; she drank tea from the same delicate old china, her daughter poured it for her with the same tender care from the same antique silver pot, and tempted her, as then, with carefully cut bread and butter, home-made cake, and fresh-gathered fruit. Had all the golden summer afternoons in all those twenty years been thus spent by these two ladies, who had grown no older in that passage of time? It was singularly pleasant and restful to think thus. How often in hot summer holidays had he paced the cloisters, a lonely, homeless boy, quaintly clad in long blue coat and yellow stockings, and thought of the walnut trees, the fruit ripening in the mellow sunshine, the cool leaf shadows on the dainty tea-board, and the sweet faded faces of the dear ladies, who had been kind to him. And it was all true, no vision that he pictured, but the pure and simple reality through all those long years.

Something of this he said as he drank from the cup, the colour and fashion of which he had carried so long in memory; and Grace, looking with serious intentness at the frank young face, felt a warm thrill in every vein and a long-forgotten leap of the heart, as if the young man's youth had entered her life, and some strong need of love in his soul had kindled it in hers. She smiled with the old young radiance so long eclipsed, a smile that to Maurice rolled the years from her brow and her heart, and transfigured her with the glory of youth. 'How beautiful she must have been, how beautiful she was! So she must have looked and smiled in youth; nay, her youth had returned,' he thought. But only that of youth had returned which is eternal, hidden, never absent, breaking out in primal effulgence, like sunshine when clouds part away.

'What had cast this brilliant and beautiful woman out of the full current and glory of life?' he wondered, discerning clearly, with a man's vision, much that had been unperceived by the child's—that unmistakable trace of having lived in the world, of having been born to greater things, to fuller, richer life, signs of vivid intellect, of unusual culture, of good breeding and birth, of *savoir faire*, together with an ineffaceable something that having received much homage ever leaves behind. The signs of deep sorrow had been patent even to the young child.

'He will go, and he will return again no more,' she was thinking, as she looked wistfully on him, and liked the way in which he spoke to her mother, understanding her weakness, gliding over

the lapses and discrepancies in her speech, and choosing the topics on which she was clearest.

'We live in great seclusion since my dear husband's death,' Mrs. Dorrien told him, 'seldom receiving at all. And this place is so remote, so very far from everywhere, that our connections cannot find us. On the borders of civilisation, dear Geoffrey; nay, on the borders of humanity, on the outskirts of life and hope itself, far away, away in trouble and pain and treachery. Oh, such treachery—between parent and child, husband and wife—black, black, black——' So she would wander into wild incoherence from sentences fairly begun. And Maurice, without any appearance of surprise, or of any of those painful, startled side-glances, as if in appeal, that her daughter had learned to dread, listened to sense and nonsense with a quiet, deferential air, catching at any break in the incoherence to suggest some topic of general interest, on which time had had no effect, or some occurrence of forty or fifty years back, on which her mind was calm.

'It is many years,' the poor lady said with a wan smile, 'since I have conversed with one who possesses the art of conversation, dear Geoffrey. Your grandfather had it.—It *was* his grandfather, Grace, or was it his father?' she added helplessly.

'Conversation as an art is gone,' Bertram would say at such a juncture. 'People are in such a hurry, they can't converse; they only catechise and assert. Did you ever meet Tom Moore?' Or, if the incoherence was very marked, it might be, 'I am tiring Mrs. Dorrien by my chatter,' rising to go.

'I have some idea of settling in the neighbourhood,' he said to Grace that afternoon at parting. 'May I call again if I do?'

He was answered by the flush and radiance of a face that quivered beneath his look.

'Oh, Mr. Bertram, ours is scarcely a house for young people. There are few that find us now, old or young. But if you want a *welcome*——'

It was Bertram's turn to flush and quiver now.

'I am a nobody, you know—a stranger with no introduction,' he said.

'It was rather rough and ready; it is not usual to be kicked into houses. Still, where do you settle?'

'At St. Ann's. Do you know St. Ann's? I am told that it is a still rising place. I have bought a practice there.'

'As lawyer?'

'Thank goodness, no. As medical practitioner. I have few introductions; my uncle's memory must be long since extinct. You may possibly have heard of Hardwin Hall?'

'Possibly—may even have seen it,' with a singular smile.

'The man who owns it—planned it, I'm told—a man of great local influence and fabulous wealth, a Mr. Hythe-Harbord, has given me one or two letters of introduction—one to a Lord Wotton.'

'None to us?' with another strange smile.

'Is he a friend of yours?' eagerly.

'Not quite. Still I have met Mr. Hythe-Harbord. Also Lord Wotton. They are—connections of ours. Wotton is an old and valued friend. This house is his. It is a good introduction. I wish you all success. But you must wear a black coat and—well——'

'Look professional? That 'll come. By the time I 've poisoned half the population of St. Ann's. Good-bye, dear Miss Dorrien, a thousand thanks for your too kind reception.' The fair head was uncovered; it was gone. Grace turned back to her mother, wondering and wondering, and through all her wonder, thinking, 'Will he really come again?'

He came again, not on a bicycle, but in a smart dogcart, and this time decorously clad as became a grave professional man in a fashionable watering-place. There was always a patient to be seen in that direction, it appeared; but that patient could seldom have been very ill, to judge from the time spent at the Old House.

'Look here, Bertram,' said young Ralph Cartmel, who was now practically in his father's place, the old gentleman seeing only a few conservative old patients, who could not trust their constitutions to a mere child of thirty; 'you 're a deuced mean chap, sneaking the governor's patients away like this. But you 'll find yourself splendidly sold, my boy. They haven't a penny, those two. They are half-starved. The governor has attended them this thirty years and never charged them a farthing, not one blessed farthing. What? You only go as a friend? That's a good one. I like that. You 're a nice innocent child. But *do* you call it professional? A wife comes handy in the profession, especially if she 's well connected, but we don't quite accuse you of making love to Miss D.—not quite.'

'You 'd *better* not.'

'What? Well I *am*—— You couldn't look redder if you were. People see your cart outside the Old House and think you are attending, and we are given up. And they are Lord Wotton's cousins.'

'Now I understand, Cartmel. I withdraw my cart henceforth.'

'Well; the governor 's awfully cut up about it, I can tell you.'

'I 'll call and explain. Shall I?'

'Mr. Cartmel is one of my dearest friends,' Miss Dorrien said,

on hearing Bertram's account of the incident. 'I would not have his feelings hurt, Maurice; no, not for worlds. I will send for him at once, dear old man, and consult him about my mother. He usually calls without being asked. His son is a degenerate being. My mother cannot endure him. He is so rough, and so free and familiar. Mursie says the patients would not tolerate Ralph but for his father's sake. Once, when Mursie took a bad turn, he walked up and down her room and swore. So she always sends for the old gentleman now; but I am afraid neither of them understands her case, which appears to be an unusual one.'

'Ralph was always rather short of brains. He used to be much with the Parkers; he helped them bully me with a very good will. They made him a catspaw time and again. Joe, the next boy, was far sharper. He came to grief. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye. We shall have to meet clandestinely henceforth, Maurice, to avoid Barling scandal. Shall it be a rope-ladder and moonlight, or a tryst in the orchard?'

'Mursie dear,' she said that day by the bedside she visited as often as she deemed it prudent to leave her mother; 'How I wish you could see my boy. I believe he would cure you, or at least help you.'

'It's glad I am, missie dear, there 's a young voice and cheerful face at the Old House; for it's lone, lone your life must be. But it's Mr. Cartmel for me, dearie. If he canna help me, he canna, and it's the Lord's will I should be ill. A true friend he's been to us all. Do ye mind the day Miss Laurie went, and poor mistress had the blinds down, and the knell tolled? A sore day it was for us all, and a tower of refuge was Mr. Cartmel.'

Did she remember the day? Was it not the death-day of youth, and hope, and trust? She remembered it very well. The white tragic face of the stricken mother, her wild words and wilder deeds; the pity and concern on the faces of Mr. Cartmel and Mr. Attwood; the anger, quickly turned to extreme pity, of Lady Wotton, who arrived poste-haste at noon, having received from her son a letter that paired with Laura's to her mother. All that underhand work going on in the Old House unsuspected by its inmates, was a hard matter to credit, until she saw the deceived mother's face and heard her distraught words; until she heard Grace's despairing cry; 'Cousin Emma, we shall *never, never* see Laura again! She may die on the passage. Only think. At night. In the dead of winter. After being so guarded. After not breathing the outside air for months. Little Laurie, my only sister. And I would have died for her. Cousin Emma, you don't know what she was to us.'

'I was unjust,' said Mrs. Dorrien, roused to sanity by this bitter cry; 'I was partial. I was betrayed. I am bereft. Only Grace is left to me now, and I have wronged her.'

Then it was that a telegraphic despatch arrived, and Mrs. Dorrien read out calmly and clearly:—

'Sir Geoffrey Harbord died at Hardwin Hall at nine o'clock this morning,' and the cloud again descended upon her troubled mind and she spread her arms in blind instinctive appeal to Grace, who sheltered her.

The telegram was the sole intimation Mrs. Dorrien ever received of her father's death, an event she never realised, always speaking of him, except at rare intervals, as of a living man. Of all his great possessions, her natural heritage, she received a parcel containing a few valueless trifles that had belonged to her poor young mother, whose life-like portrait continued to smile beneath the Rape of Persephone in the grand dining-room at Hardwin.

Laura at first wrote long happy letters to her mother and sister, letters read but unheeded, by Mrs. Dorrien, who would sometimes ask in a bewildered way after such a perusal:—

'Who is Laura Garenne?' when Grace would reply:

'Dear mother, it is our own Laura, my little sister, Laura. She married Raymond Garenne.'

But Mrs. Dorrien always repeated that she did not know Laura Garenne; had never heard of her.

'Laura is dead,' she often said. 'The Old House is damp and cold; it killed my little Laura. She died long, long ago.'

But Laura lived just long enough to bring a son into the world, but not to see him.

'Come to me, Grace,' her last brief sad letter implored, 'I am so lonely. Raymond is only a man; I need a woman friend now.'

Grace had decided to go to her, when Raymond's tidings of death and birth reached her, and she broke the intelligence gently and fearfully to Mrs. Dorrien, who only repeated the old sentence:

'Laura is dead. She died long, long ago.'

CHAPTER II

How much did her mother know of the real events passing before her? Grace often wondered. Her own bitter grief at those final tidings of poor little Laura excited no comment; she gave full expression to it in the first uncontrollable burst of

sorrow; but Mrs. Dorrien only looked on with a sad and piteous wonder, saying nothing. Grace told her all; of the little son, who was christened Geoffrey, and who, after a few weeks, was laid by the side of his poor young mother in the English cemetery at Rome; of the marble cross on the grave, and of the violets that grew upon the turf. She spoke of the tablet that was to be placed in Barling Church within sight of the Old House pew, and led her mother thither to see it on a week-day, when the church was empty, dreading some serious outburst at the first sight. But Mrs. Dorrien quietly deciphered the inscription and quietly wept, repeating that it was so long ago. Grace also read out to her many accounts of Sir Geoffrey's funeral, obituary notices, tributes to his memory, the inscription on his tomb, and the disposal of his property. She listened attentively; she seemed to understand, though all was taken very quietly.

But those nocturnal wanderings and laments, witnessed by little Maurice Bertram years after, dated from that time; it was Mursell's opinion that Mrs. Dorrien's indifference was in a great measure assumed from pride, and that the constraint she put upon herself by day greatly aggravated the real affliction that had befallen the poor lady's harassed intellect.

One afternoon, at the turn of the days, some seven or eight weeks after Laura's flight, mother and daughter were sitting in the withdrawing-room over their tea. Mrs. Dorrien at this time, and for long after, was apathetic and taciturn, passing hours and hours without motion or speech, evidently brooding over unspoken griefs. Mr. Cartmel advised that no notice should be taken of this condition, that things should go on as usual, and family matters be discussed, quietly but not too often, in her hearing, until time deadened the pain of the two great shocks she had received, and nature re-asserted herself. That afternoon she had taken up some needlework and paid some slight attention to news Grace had read in the paper, and heard from the village. The air had the curious, almost painful, thrill of returning vitality that comes at the turn of the days, when the sap begins to rise and the delaying sunsets are brilliant and cold. This elemental influence, Grace hoped, was now upon her mother's darkened mind, whence the clouds might soon roll away, with the coming on of spring and the full splendour of summer. The bounding youth in her own veins triumphed over the sad monotony and privation of her life; she was outwardly gay and inwardly hopeful, and had treated Miss Tattwood and Miss Attwood to some merry quips and cranks when they called an hour before.

'Miss Attwood, my dear,' her husband observed as the pair

trotted cheerily homewards, 'that is a brave young heart at the Old House. It warms my blood, it takes years from my age to see her.'

'Miss Tattwood, my dear, I could almost be jealous.'

'Miss Attwood, my dear, you have reason, which is a very rare thing in your sex. Had it pleased a beneficent and all-ruling Providence to bless our union with offspring, I confess that a feminine creature, with a gaiety of spirit and gallantry of heart such as that of our spirited and beautiful young friend, would have constituted a matchless adornment for our tranquil hearth.'

'Indeed, Miss Tattwood, my dear, I never cease to regret, though I trust I do not repine,' the little woman replied with a catch in her breath.

'Your principles, Miss Attwood, my dear, are, I trust, too firmly based and too securely founded for any such sinful revolt against the purposes of the All-Wise. Yet is our fallen nature so strong within us, and so difficult to subdue, that there are times, even in the most elevated souls, when the old Eve is prone to assert herself, and rebellious thoughts and questionings arise. Against such, Miss Attwood, it is your undoubted duty to struggle with energy and courage. Consider the mercies with which you are surrounded, the manifold blessings which have fallen to your lot. Competence without undue toil, useful occupation without excessive strain upon natural energy, cheerful domestic surroundings remote from the temptations of the great world, a dignified position, yet free from the trappings of pomp, the snares of luxury, and the cares of social gaiety. Health, tranquillity, religious privileges, and a certain measure of connubial bliss. Against a lot so tranquil, so overflowing with mercies, it were surely the part of a Pagan to repine. While for a Christian, Miss Attwood, my dear, such manifold blessings, were they not ordained from on high, would be almost too enervating, and destructive of the firm moral fibre that is amongst the best results of adversity.'

'Certainly, Miss Tattwood, my dear,' returned the gentle little spouse, well accustomed to hear her husband's failings in her own person, and thus vicariously to receive admonitions suitable to his own case; 'but I often wonder who the lover is. It has been more than hinted that his lordship——'

'Gossip, Miss Attwood, my dear, has ever been the bane of your sex,' came snapping out with a fierce look upon the owl and cherub face.

'Certainly, Miss Tattwood, my dear. But she 'll have nothing

to say to him, I'll be bound. And she must have had dozens to choose from. The pretty bird, mewed in that dreary cage. Shut up alone with that poor, distracted mother from morning till night. I could wish somebody would make a moonlight flitting with *her*, poor child. Laura to run away! Always selfish. That Sir Geoffrey must have been an excessively bad old man.'

'Fie, Miss Attwood, my dear! Who are we that we should judge others, much less question the inscrutable decrees of Omniscience? Nevertheless, my heart often aches for that dear young creature, exposed to trials so rare to youth.'

The object of this warm regard was rejoicing over signs of returning health in her mother, when the rare sound of the door-bell was heard through the quiet house, and soon followed by the appearance of Mursell, with the announcement that a young person wished to see Mrs. Dorrien.

'Why, Mursie, you're all of a quiver,' was Grace's comment. 'Has your jam turned mouldy? Have the rats been at your apples again? What does the young person want, and who is she?'

'Her name is Hester Thwaite, and she wishes to see the mistress,' replied Mursell gravely. 'Miss Carrie, dear, she comes from Hardwin,' she added with bated breath.

'Hardwin? Hester Thwaite?' echoed Mrs. Dorrien, roused to attention. 'Nothing to me, Mursell, nothing.'

'Will ye no see her, mem? She has come all the way from Hardwin Hall, where she was housemaid, with a message, dearie.'

'There is no one now at Hardwin to send me messages, not one. Who could send a message to me?' repeated Mrs. Dorrien, in ever-growing agitation.

'A message from the dead,' pronounced an unknown voice from the gloom behind Mursell, and a young woman stepped out of the shadow into the fitful light. 'I *must* see the leddy, Mrs. Mursell,' she added, as Mursell waved her back.

'What is this?' asked Mrs. Dorrien, putting up her gold-rimmed eyeglasses and haughtily scanning the intruder. 'Are you aware whom you are addressing, young woman?'

'If you please, ma'am, begging your pardon, I take ye for Mrs. Clarence Dorrien, Sir Geoffrey Harbord's only daughter, and the yoong leddy for Miss Grace Dorrien, that was staying at the Hall,' she replied, as Grace flung some small wood and fir cones on the fire, making flames leap up and light the corners of the room.

'Quite right. Now your message,' Mrs. Dorrien returned.

'If you please, ma'am, I saw Sir Geoffrey Harbord die. I went into his room as usual that morning, and found him quite alone. He had been better, and had a good night; his nurse had a day off. Mr. Lytham, the valet, was in the dressing-room; Mrs. Hythe-Harbord was in another room opening into th' ode mawster's room; else Sir Geoffrey was alone.'

Mrs. Dorrien had changed from red to white, from trembling to marble stillness; she now rose and stood in the bright light, as if to receive with due reverence tidings of such import. Grace looked from one to the other, bright-eyed and pale.

'Pray continue,' Mrs. Dorrien said. 'You found my father alone?'

'Yes, ma'am. Th' ode mawster rose himself up in bed and looked anxious and frightened. He put his finger on his mouth, then pointed to the open door. I shut it, and came up to him to listen, for his speech was no that good since his stroke. Then he bade me be secret and quick, and write down what he said, for there was them about t' house would hinder him. And 'twas to you, mem, he wanted to write. And I wrote down what he told me on paper at the writing-table, and kept it, and have brought it all the way down here. See, 'tis Hardwin paper, with arms and all. And I would have got it to ye by the electric telegraph if I'd a died for it, only it was too late. For when th' ode mawster saw me write his words down, there come a change——'

Mrs. Dorrien sank into her chair and covered her face.

'Go on with your story,' she said, finding that the girl hesitated.

'A change, ma'am, would ha' done your heart good to see. He seemed to quieten down like a rocked bairn, poor gentleman. The trouble went out of his face, and a beautiful smile came over it—such a smile, it was fair and peaceful to see; th' ode mawster was a fine man, grand to look at, ye 'll mind. Then he joost lay back on the pillows, with that same bonnie smile and a sort of sigh, like a child, and went to sleep. Eh, but he slept fine; and he never wakened, never. Then Mr. Lytham, Sir Geoffrey's own man, came back, and I squeezed the paper up and put it in my pocket, and made believe I was joost idling about, watching Sir Geoffrey in his sleep. I didn't rightly know th' ode mawster was gone in that bonnie sleep, ma'am, so I wouldna let on about the letter. And when Mr. Lytham threw up his hands, and called t' mawster, and told him Sir Geoffrey was gone, I thought maybe it would but trouble ye to know the

poor gentleman had wanted to see ye too late. Then I thought for sure you'd be at the burying, and I'd give it to you quiet and secret. And I couldna trust such a matter to writing, and couldna leave without losing my month's wage. And there was things said in the servants' hall and whispered about of the yoong mawster. For Mr. Hythe-Harbord had got everything. And they do say Mr. Philip never fired that gun at the horse. And 'twas he had set t' dogs on to Miss Dorrien, and bid the men turn her away, ay, and many things he'd done. For he fair turned th' ode mawster round his finger, did Mr. Hythe-Harbord. And some of us knew he was cruel to the mistress, poor leddy, and she went in terror of her life and Mr. Philip's, and there was often quarrelling over writing to Mrs. and Miss Dorrien. All this came out after the burying and reading of the will, and no mention of his own flesh and blood in it, which raised talk among the servants, one and another——'

'Enough,' Mrs. Dorrien said through her quiet weeping—'enough of idle gossip. You have done your duty in relating what passed in the death-chamber, and in faithfully justifying the solemn trust reposed in you. But why the delay in sending me my dear father's message?'

'It was just the gossip, ma'am, and knowing how Mr. Hythe-Harbord opened and looked through every post-bag, and we so far from any post-office. Then, though no scholar, I did think Barling wanted something after, to make sure it went safe. So I e'en thought I'd bring it, and happen you would like to hear how Sir Geoffrey passed away; for I have a fawther myself, ma'am, and I ken well it must be a sore thing to lose one. And with ill-blood between, too. But, ma'am, I would have you to know that Sir Geoffrey could not die with ill-blood between—sending for his daughter lightened his mind and let him die happy. He had turned against the yoong mawster since the stroke he had gotten in the autumn. They were alone together and they'd quarrelled, when Sir Geoffrey was carried in palsy-struck. Mr. Lytham, Sir Geoffrey's valet, was talking it over with the butler one day when I was by. Mr. Hythe-Harbord's face was cut and bleeding when he called one of the gardeners to Sir Geoffrey. For Mr. Hythe-Harbord has no born right at the Hall. He is but a cuckoo in the nest.'

'Enough, enough of that,' Mrs. Dorrien interrupted with quiet sadness. 'But Sir Geoffrey's illness is another matter. Caused by a quarrel. His nephew's face was cut! How was that?'

''Twas a necklace th' ode mawster threw in his face with high

words; one of the gardeners heard it all. Mr. Hythe-Harbord took the bead necklace out of his pocket and gave it to Sir Geoffrey, and Sir Geoffrey he ups with it and flings it in Mr. Hythe-Harbord's face, and falls down in a fit. Some of the stones was picked up days and days after.'

'What kind of stones?' Grace asked.

'Diamonds, miss, and they coloured ones that never look the same twice; what do they be called? hopefuls, is it?'

'Opals. Mother, I can explain that later. Did Sir Geoffrey never recover at all from that seizure, Hester?'

'Not enough to leave his bed, miss. No more than the day he died. But he'd been failing long before the stroke. They say he never played the organ after his son-in-law, Colonel Dorrien's death. Mr. Lytham always said he fretted for a letter from—begging your pardon, mem—from his daughter. It cut him to hear it from Mr. Hythe-Harbord.'

'What is this, young woman?' cried Mrs. Dorrien, trembling. 'What do you mean? Who said that his daughter did not write?'

'You see, ma'am, th'ode mawster was none so careful what he said before people in his old age. And he'd say at table many a time after Colonel Dorrien's death, "She'll never write now, never. If that trouble couldn't bring her pride down and turn her to her poor, deserted father, nothing will." The men talked of it, and they often said Mr. Hythe-Harbord was too careful of the post-bag. *He always opened it behind locked doors.* And the day they heard of Colonel Dorrien's death, Sir Geoffrey went to open the bag himself. But t' yoong mawster was before him and locked himself in, and wouldn't open the door. Sir Geoffrey was outside knocking and knocking. Some of the men saw him. At last the door opened and he went in, and came out all broken-like. Then he played the "Dead March" on the organ, that solemn it was no canny to hear. And he never played the organ again any more. Ah, never heard him play myself no more after that.'

Mrs. Dorrien rose, and, turning away, said—

'Oblige me by giving this young woman some refreshment, Mursell. She will, of course, pass the night in the Old House. I thank you for your faithful discharge of your poor master's dying trust, Hester. While I live you will not want a friend, remember.'

'We have fallen low, Grace,' she added quite calmly, when the girl had left the room. 'Your dear grandfather's forgiveness, his last

moments, and his last days come to us by stealth through one of the humblest of his servants. You were right in your estimate of Brinson Hythe's character. He is an exceedingly bad man. What a forked tongue! My poor, dear, deluded father! But oh, Grace, he did forgive me, in spite of all,' she sobbed, suddenly breaking down. 'Look at the paper, crumpled and soiled. This is true, is it not? *This* is no dream. Oh! I have dreamed so much of late, dear. Sometimes I have feared that I was myself only a dream. All seemed but a bad dream.'

'You have had too much trouble,' Grace replied, crying softly for joy; 'that gave you bad dreams. But you are awake at last, the dreams are gone. You know now that dear Grannie was true to you and discovered that Judas's treachery. If he could but have lived a little longer that you might have gone to him! He was *quite sure* you would come. He died happily in that confidence.'

Mrs. Dorrien slept like a child that night, and on many succeeding nights; and by day she moved cheerfully in the house, and occupied herself with books, work, and music. Grace was quite happy about her.

'Ought I to trouble her about Laura?' she asked Mr. Attwood. 'She has never forgiven her, you know, and Laura is always asking it. Mr. Cartmel says it would agitate her, and perhaps throw her back into the old state.'

Mr. Attwood was perplexed. But he was quite certain that Grace was not to speak; the office was his if any one's. So one day, with great gentleness and discretion, he found an opportunity to introduce the subject.

'Dear Mr. Attwood,' Mrs. Dorrien replied tranquilly, 'can you doubt that I have forgiven my little Laurie? I forgave her from my heart long ago. But,' she added sorrowfully, 'so much is forgotten. She died so long ago, so very, very long ago.'

'The poor lady's mind has yet to recover the shock of her daughter's flight, Miss Grace,' he said, when telling her of the result of his diplomacy. 'But it will recover in good time, my dear; in God's good time. Keep up your heart and hope. It would doubtless be well to appear to ignore this misapprehension of fact, to speak freely of Mrs. Garenne to her mother, and openly read and discuss her letters. Thus we may rationally expect to accustom Mrs. Dorrien so to think of her daughter as living and gaining health in her continental sojourn, as to give credence to the fact, and rejoice in it with her own returning health.'

But the misapprehension never passed away; the clouds temporarily dispersed by the knowledge of her father's last thoughts of her returned, and Mrs. Dorrien's mind was again confused in a dream atmosphere, where past things and things to come were hopelessly mingled, and things present became dim and intangible.

'It is better so,' Mr. Cartmel said, when the news of Laura's death arrived; 'she is spared this bereavement.'

'Mr. Cartmel,' Grace asked, fixing her soft dark eyes with wistful intensity upon his face, 'will my mother never recover?'

He turned away in his brusque fashion and frowned savagely; it was one of those moments in which Mr. Cartmel was utterly at a loss to know what to say; his lips formed themselves into forbidding curves; he tapped the ground impatiently with his heavy boot for a minute. Then he turned back as brusquely and scowled at the sorrowful young face.

'How can I tell?' he said harshly; 'how can anybody tell?'

'Ah! I know now,' she thought to herself, pressing her hands tightly together, and looking down on the ground in a way that cut him to the heart.

'What an old beast I am,' he growled; 'why can't I say something kind and pleasant?'

'Because there is nothing pleasant to be said,' she replied, with one of those smiles that are more heartbreaking than any tears.

'I 'm a rough old bear, and I can't tell lies,' he grumbled; 'I often wish I could. While there's life there's hope, my dear. That's a true truism. We doctors don't know much after all; we pull long faces and look knowing, and are just as wise as Duke there. How you must hate the sight of my cross, crusty face.'

'Nay, it is the most comforting sight I ever have; you are one of my best friends,' she replied, laying her hand on his arm; 'you and Mr. Attwood.'

'A nice pair,' he snarled, striding out of the house and mounting patient Dapple, who was in no hurry; 'a nice pair of cavaliers for that fairy-tale princess. That honest old owl, Attwood, Miss Tattwood, as she calls him.'

Nevertheless, Grace was glad to carry many and many a trouble to these rough cavaliers, through many a sorrowful year. And it was a sad day for her when some ill wind, sweeping over the wintry marshes, laid dear Miss Attwood's grey head under the churchyard turf, a sadder still, when poor Miss Tattwood, after a few months of dazed and helpless loneliness, joined his little wife

in her long home, leaving behind him a void that was never filled, when strangers reigned at the Rectory, gathering the roses budded so carefully by the little lady, and eating the apples grafted by her husband.

Through the quiet passing of those years, a gallant, perpetual fight was waged with penury. The full extent of this penury only crept into Grace's knowledge by slow degrees, and was greatly aggravated by Mrs. Dorrien's unconsciousness of it. The poor lady wanted this, and was surprised at the absence of that; fretted against the deprivation of luxuries that through lifelong use had become necessities.

Many an anxious consultation was held with Mursell upon ways and means—the young servant was dismissed; Grace did household work in her stead.

'I should die of dulness if I didn't, Mursie,' she would say, when Mursell mourned over the sight of her darling kneading bread, mixing puddings, and wielding brooms, with equal gaiety and dexterity; 'or have enlarged liver, like a Strasburg goose. Exercise, Mr. Cartmel tells us, keeps people good-tempered. One must do something, one thing is as good as another in the long-run.'

'Not for the hands,' Mursell lamented, 'I'd sooner see ye at the penting, Miss Greece.'

'But that's bad for the nose, Mursell. Stooping sends the blood to the face and head. If—I could only *sell* the water-colours. A grand idea.'

The idea was acted upon. The best drawings were selected and carried round Oldport, Sandyknowe, and St. Ann's. Some, after much persuasion, were exposed in stationers' windows, where they collected dust and grew faded and fly-blown. Now and then one was sold for a few shillings.

'After all, it is much more amusing only to sell one occasionally,' Grace said, 'then it is an event, and there are so few events here. Nothing ever happens or ever has happened at Barling. Things really must happen sometimes, to keep people alive.' But to Mursell it seemed weary work.

'Suppose I give up being an artist and commence author, Mursell?' Grace proposed at last, when the drawings were too fly-blown to remain in the windows.

'Why not, missie? It's no that expensive. Joost a bit of paper and pen and ink, is all that's wanted for the writing. No pent boxes, no brushes and card-board, no frames, no catching your death of cold with sitting out-of-doors in the draughts and rain.'

'No trying to draw cows that jump up in the middle. No being kicked over by frisky colts and calves. No being charged by mad bulls just as you've caught some fine effect. Writing strikes me as a singularly easy profession. All you have to do is to sit down and—write. But what shall I write, Mursie?'

'Joost a book, dearie. But I would no write joost any book. I would write the kind of book people buy most of,' advised the canny north-country woman, 'but joost a book.'

'So simple. I wonder why people ever choose any other profession? I must ask dear Miss Tattwood what kind of books people buy most of, and write one immediately. I wonder how many quires of paper it will take?'

'People buy most potry books, Miss Greece, and it's that easy to write—ye ken Mr. Wordsworth at Rydal Mount? Many a time I've seen him "booing about" the country roads, making his pieces. And ye'll no go into any shop but ye'll find Mr. Wordsworth's books. Then the potry pieces soon fill the book, with the lines only going half way across the paper and empty bits between. But ye'll no buy the book any cheaper for that.'

'Dear Mursell! That had never struck me, do you know. But the rhymes?'

'Eh! dearie, but 'tis joost the rhymes that carry ye along to remember the pieces. If they're that helpful to read and to mind, they'll be joost as helpful in the writing.'

'I begin to wonder why I never thought of this before, Mursell. Why am I not a poet? Such simple subjects as Mr. Wordsworth chose, too! Idiot boys and donkeys.'

Can ye no make a piece about idiot girls and geese, missie dear? Then Mr. Wordsworth has made a grand piece, nigh as hard to understand as Revelations. In—Inclinations to Immorality, is it? Eh! but it's fine, dearie, "trailing clouds of glory," and some of the lines that short. And what it's all aboot, the Lord only knows. But it's grand Sunday reading. Ye can joost sit doon nigh the mistress and tell her the day's news, and see that she's comfortable and mend the fire, and aye be writing your pieces, like Mr. Wordsworth. And ye can boo the lines o'er in the lanes, like him. Ye can say them to me in the kitchen at nights, missie dear. The lile sonnets. One aboot Westminster, now. Can ye not make a sonnet about St. Paul's? No expense, and no leaving the mistress, dearie.'

'I'll set to work at once, Mursie dear. But the worst of it is, I'm not Mr. Wordsworth. And I know I'm not capable of such "Inclinations to Immorality" as he was.'

So Grace commenced author. For the next ten or fifteen years her handwriting embellished the waste-paper baskets of many editors, and distressed the sight of many publisher's readers. Some poems found their way into print, but she never saw them. Once a sketch of village life was printed in a magazine that went bankrupt, and paid nothing. Once she received a guinea for a spirited story of five thousand words; once she had ten shillings for a descriptive essay. But she reaped rich harvest of bitter disappointment, and sickening heart-ache, of hope long deferred and foiled at last; and suffered much weariness of brain and hand from labour that profited nothing.

There is much pain and weariness and disappointment, and there are many wearing and exhausting occupations in this work-a-day world; but there is nothing that crushes life from the heart and health from the body, like writing on without success. Efficiency in all other crafts and trades can to some extent be gauged; but there is no standard by which unpublished literary work can be measured, while the one person who sees it, is the least capable of appraising it. So at last Grace Dorrien gave up the profession of author.

CHAPTER III

NEWCOURT PLACE was seven miles from the Old House; and seven miles in the country is seven solid miles of summer sun and winter cold. Therefore Lady Wotton's visits to Mrs. Dorrien became fewer with advancing years and increasing infirmities, and therefore the Newcourt carriages conveyed Mrs. Dorrien only once a year, and then not at all, over the downs to Newcourt. In course of time Raymond Garenne took a second wife, who surrounded him with a troop of rosy daughters. For several years Lord Wotton's visits to the Old House were regular, but formal, and productive of little enjoyment on either side. The lover was too pronounced and enduring in Lord Wotton ever to be merged in the brother, else Grace might have confided their difficulties to him and received such secret, or open, help for her mother, as she could not accept from one who still hoped and sued for her heart. Nor did this state of affairs by any means increase cordiality between Lady Wotton and Grace, who was equally unacceptable to the mother for inspiring and for refusing Wotton's true and noble passion.

And when, after the birth of Raymond's fifth daughter, Lord

Wotton married a woman to whom he honestly confessed his unconquered love for his cousin, while offering only warm friendship and esteem to herself, his visits to the Old House became still rarer and more formal than before.

His firstborn son and daughter were successively presented at the Old House and subsequently conveyed thither once a year. Raymond Garenne came no more after his second marriage, but contented himself with writing to announce perpetual one-of-these-fine-days visits.

Thus a great solitude gathered over the Old House, where strangers and new acquaintances were inadmissible in consequence of Mrs. Dorrien's ill-health. New people kept coming to Barling, with the latter-day torment of mushroom villas, but the Old House did not call on new people. St. Ann's grew into a fashionable watering-place, Sandyknowe sprang from two villas and a hotel to a sizeable town with every civilised requisite for making life sordid and intolerable. Barling harbour, cradled in a cleft of the downs, and studded with masts and sails, vanished, and was replaced by a dreary waste, in time converted into golf-links and traversed by a railway. But the Old House continued as before; the walnut trees put forth leaves and fruit and shed them, the sun-dial marked the shining hours and ignored the dark ones, peaches ripened on the sunny walls, roses bloomed and fell: fresh meaning and mystery gathered about the time-worn roofs and walls: the trees without and the wainscotting within seemed day by day more and more eloquent of unspoken things.

Long before that ill winter wind swept the dear old Attwoods under the earth, the Dorriens' extreme poverty had been somewhat mitigated by those ever friendly and ever musical trees, under whose shade Maurice Bertram had been, and was yet to be, so happy. One sunny autumn day, when the walnut trees hung heavy with fruit, and the ground was strewn with windfalls, Chip, the gardener, piled his barrow with them and groaned at the waste.

'Pity to drow all this yer to the pigs, miss,' he lamented, as he paused to dry his hot face; 'there's entirely a fortune on they there trees. The hripe nuts is worth a pound a tree and more wholesale, and the green uns for pickles and ketchup prett nigh another pound, with enough left to veed two or dree pegs, let alone the best for the missus. I 'lows 'tis entirely wicked to let em hrot.'

'Yes, Chip, I quite agree,' Miss Dorrien replied, 'but how

often have I asked you to take them and do what you like with them?'

'And how often hev I said I baint a-gwine to rob 'ee?' retorted Chip, angrily.

She smiled, her face went red, then white, then red again; she moved away to another part of the garden, gathering, tying up, up-rooting and cutting as she went. Presently she returned to the walnut trees and Chip.

'Who would buy them?' she asked, without preamble.

'Anybody as had any zense. Grinham, at St. Ann's, he'd buy em and carr em off, vor ee. You let me alone, miss, and I'll do it as though 'twas for myself, and give ee the money at the end.'

'If it could be managed without vexing or deceiving Mrs. Dorrien, Chip,' came falteringly; 'and of course you would take a commission.'

'Of coorse,' he replied with sarcasm, 'zaäme as I do when I digs taties vor ee. Grinham med so well hae some peaches and vigs, medn't ee?'

'I suppose so,' very mournfully.

'Be ee gwine to eat all they filberts?'

'Not *quite* all.'

'Why can't ee let Dove hae some chicken and ducks and vresh eggs? I 'lows you 've got more than ee can eat?'

'Chip, Chip, what a dreadful man you are! If one gives you an inch you take an ell. I must go in before I am stripped of all I possess,' said the heiress of Hardwin Hall, walking away from triumphant Chip and taking refuge in the hall, where Mursell was laying the cloth for the midday dinner.

'I 've set up as market gardener now, Mursie,' she said. 'After all, the growing population of St. Ann's must be fed. Philanthropy should be practical as well as theoretical.' Her mouth quivered as she spoke. Mursell burst into tears.'

Gardening is not, like literature, one of the liberal arts, Grace soon discovered,—unless you rent your ground, stock it, pay for labour and rely upon such fruit as survives fickle English springs, as she did not. Combined with pigs and poultry, with a good balance of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, and backed by the produce of nut trees in vigorous prime, it offers a wholesome and interesting occupation as well as a modest profit. It is not to be supposed that the scheme was a sudden inspiration of Chip's brain—an organ that worked slowly if steadily, and was more calculated to retain than to receive impressions—on the contrary,

it had long been the subject of much debate in the Old House, always meeting with a positive veto from Mrs. Dorrien.

'If we must starve,' she would say, 'we must. But at least let us starve with dignity.'

'But Wotton sells his game, mother dear,' Grace would urge in reply; 'yet he keeps his dignity.'

'I beg your pardon, Grace,' Mrs. Dorrien would return; 'he does nothing of the kind. He sells it for twopence-halfpenny a year.'

Many a time when Grace was detected in some household or vegetable-garden occupation, her mother would bitterly lament the cruel necessity of toil so unbecoming.

'It may spoil my hands,' Grace would sometimes reply; 'but I cannot think cleanliness and neatness ignoble. Nor can I see that vegetable- and fruit-gardening is more degrading than flower-gardening. The occupation is healthy and pleasant, and there are not *many* amusements at Barling,' she added one day, with a wistfulness in face and voice that cut Mrs. Dorrien to the heart, and produced sudden tears.

'Oh! Grace, Grace, my own poor, beautiful child,' she sobbed, 'what a life for youth and beauty and intellect, such as yours! Go away and leave me, dear. You were neither born nor bred for this. Oh! how different, how brilliant, your life might be, but for your wretched mother! How many a splendid home, how many a high position, you might choose from, my poor, poor child!'

'So I might,' she replied; 'one can always sell one's soul, you know. It's the easiest thing on earth. Easy, too, to throw away the only chance of happiness and peace. But not easy to recover these things, once lost.'

'What do you mean, Grace?' her poor mother asked in piteous bewilderment; 'you are so clever and strange, I cannot understand half of what you say.'

Something rose chokingly in Grace's throat; she remembered poor Pippin; the helpless, troubled look in her mother's eyes had often been visible in his.

'I mean, mother dear,' she said very gently after that spasm of pity and pain, 'that I could not be happy without you. Would you be *very* happy without me? I love the Old House; I like gardening; it is very good for me. And I'm quite sure,' with a sudden smile, 'that you appreciate early peas and potatoes. Confess that you are fond of asparagus. And have no great objection to spring chickens.'

Far from disapproving of these delicates, Mrs. Dorrien often

asked for them when they were impossible to procure. Dining at midday, or on less than four courses, was frequently styled impossible and foolish parsimony.

'Why,' she would often ask, 'should we live in this extraordinary manner? I never did so in your dear father's lifetime, and you must remember, Grace, that his affairs were sometimes in the most embarrassed condition. Neither did I before my marriage. Yet my father used to say that he detested *gourmandise*; he was the most temperate and abstemious of men. His table was always noted for an elegant simplicity. He had an excessive dislike for fruit and vegetables forced out of season. "They take all the poetry from the table," he used to say. "They are essentially vulgar, immoral, and inartistic." At the same time the unlovely, matter-of-fact *bourgeoisie* of solid joints was an offence to his æsthetic perceptions. How little you resemble your dear grandfather, Grace! I suppose it is the Dorrien blood, with its *bourgeois* strain. I do not ask for peaches when they are a guinea a piece, or strawberries at a pound a dozen. But I cannot dine on cold mutton and plain-boiled vegetables.' Nor did she; for Grace could not bear to see her mother's untasted plate, when nothing more inviting than such 'rude abundance,' as she styled it, appeared.

Sometimes Mrs. Dorrien urged her daughter to make a continental or yachting tour; she was looking fagged, was growing dull, in their rustic seclusion. Why did she not do as others of her age and position did? The Garennes would like her at Newcourt or in their town house, so would others; it was so long since she had had a London season. She used to like Ascot and Henley; why would she sit moping at home for ever with her sick and sorrowful mother? When Mark Hilton came at last, all her bloom would be gone; he would find a dull and withered old maid. Autumn would soon come, and with it the long-tarrying lover.

'I will go away when you do,' Grace sometimes promised; and then she heard that it was impossible for Mrs. Dorrien to leave the Old House until the long-expected guests had arrived, as they might any day—by coach, or, after the railway came, by train.

Gradually the gardening became more elaborate; sea-kale, early rhubarb, and celery were cultivated, with abundance of common produce; the poultry-yard became more populous, a dove-cote appeared, and a goodly row of bee-hives was set up; yet Chip gave little more time than before this excursion into commerce. Now his pony-cart, going twice a week to St. Ann's

and once to Sandyknowe, was laden not only with his own garden produce, but with that of the Old House. Yet Mrs. Dorrien never discovered what was going on.

The interest and out-door exercise afforded by this profitable occupation promoted health and prevented brooding; but the solitude grew with the years, closing upon Grace's lonely, unsatisfied heart with an iron grip, walling her round in blank isolation that sometimes became intolerable.

Into one of these spasms of loneliness came the sunny head and innocent blue eyes of little Maurice Bertram, as if to show her what she had missed. Fair-haired, blue-eyed boys always went closer to her heart than other children; Wotton's rarely-seen boys and girls were dark. Mursell was married by the time he came; and although her marriage only meant stepping across the road to the *Bugle* to live, and appearing at the Old House nearly every day, it was a sad wrench to her former nurseling and lifelong darling. Mrs. Dorrien scarcely missed her. She enjoyed Mursell's visits, and sometimes patronised her husband through the iron gate.

And when Maurice's clinging arms were unclasped for the last time from Grace's neck, there had been sad heart-ache. He was not forgotten, but his reappearance twenty years later was one of the least expected things in life. Then children no longer interested her as before; young men and maidens now had power to vibrate the deepest heart-chords, especially young men with fair hair. A blue-eyed gunner from Culveredge Fort had touched her deeply, especially when he came to church with his men in uniform. If she met this young officer in the village or on the downs, it was an event; once he opened a gate for her. To look at the fort on the down and think of him and ponder and dream on the possibilities of his life; to speculate upon his mother, his sisters, and if there were one who possessed the golden treasure of his heart, dissipated the empty solitude of life. One day a dark-haired lad appeared in his place at church, and Mursell chanced to say that 'young Mr. Audley was ordered to Woolwich last week,' so then the solitude rolled back upon her like a wave.

Bertram's close vicinity at St. Ann's was more than could have been hoped or dreamed; and yet, though he came so often, and had become at his earnest desire Maurice, it was felt that this could not last. His profession would engulf him, he would be drawn into the whirling wave of his contemporaries; the love-drama would absorb him, wife and child claim his whole thoughts

and affections: the sooner the better for the dear boy's sake. The Old House was no place for virile youth; two faded, sorrow-stricken women no society. So Miss Dorrien told her young cavalier time and again.

'Is there no club at St. Ann's?' she asked, 'or is there no society for you? Surely the Cartmels entertain, and Barling Rectory.'

Oh yes, there was a club to which he belonged; he visited at Barling Rectory and at the Cartmels and elsewhere. His professional visits, he was sorry to say, were as yet not too numerous. One must hope for the best; for a good rousing epidemic—cholera, typhoid, diphtheria, or some such grand opportunity.

'Maurice, you deserve hanging.'

'This is the only home I ever had, Miss Dorrien; don't drive me away. It's true I've no shadow of claim here.'

'Heaven knows you are welcome enough,' she replied, bending over a garden bed to uproot something or pluck something else. 'It is so rarely that my dear mother can endure the few young people who ever come here. I tried to entice the Cartmels—first as children, and then as they grew up, and the Parker children in the same manner; but she would suffer none of them. She took to you at once; she counts upon seeing you, and is always calmer after your visits.'

'Of course; this unnatural solitude is the very worst thing for her. Why did she give up visiting?'

'Pride partly, poverty greatly. One cannot go far without at least one carriage. Then Barling folk are tethered to their steeple; they have no interests or thoughts beyond. The dear Attwoods were a great resource. But they died so long ago, soon after you were born. She just tolerates Mr. Cartmel; but Mrs. Cartmel is too limited. I like Mrs. Cartmel; so genuine and kind, homely but never vulgar. Ralph Cartmel is a very rough—h'm—diamond.'

'But the Heathcotes? They are nice people. I dined there last week. They knew Uncle Matt, little thinking they would one day be in his place. Heathcote was his curate once.'

'They are very pleasant people, but I suppose they came too late; she takes no pleasure in their visits. To tell the truth, modern manners are——' A smile conveyed Miss Dorrien's meaning better than words.

'Rather too up-to-date. There must have been more formality and more polish in Mrs. Dorrien's youth, but more true courtesy scarcely, was there?'

'Well, I wasn't born then; so I can't say. Now go away, and don't spend too much time moping in this solitary owl's nest, there's a dear boy.'

Such speeches, with accompanying smiles and soft looks, were hardly calculated to discourage Bertram's visits to the Old House, nor was Grace too anxious to do so. She had too firm a grip on reality, in spite of her seclusion, not to know what pitfalls await young and homeless men, or what pitiful and perilous substitutes often help to fill the blanks in such lives.

It was very sweet to feel that an assured welcome and appointed place at their secluded hearth might mean moral security and emotional health to this young man, at the most perilous spring-tide of vitality and latent passion. How had the solitary, kinless boy hitherto breasted that stormy world-ocean, she wondered, sometimes asking where he had been and how fared on his uncompanioned voyage, and receiving such accounts as convinced her that there was little of which he could not speak openly.

One night in the late autumn following Bertram's spring settlement at St. Ann's, Mrs. Dorrien lingered late in her easy-chair by the fire, tired yet loth to go to bed. The evening had passed with unusual calm, even with enjoyment. The harp and guitar had been touched, Grace had sung; they had played duets; the usual game of backgammon, at which Mrs. Dorrien invariably won, without observing it, had been refused for conversation of the reminiscent nature dear to old age. There had been no lethargy, no querulous tones, no confusion or excitement. All had been clear, tranquil, and pleasant.

Bertram had called at dusk. Mrs. Dorrien had talked long and most interestingly with him, of public events and manners and customs of her youth—of grand figures of that long-vanished day, of the Iron Duke, of thirteen-penny and eighteen-penny postage, of franked letters, of tinder-boxes, tallow candles and gas, and of the effect these small conveniences had upon society, also of the great literature that had arisen since her birth.

'It is an education to talk to Mrs. Dorrien,' Bertram said, when Grace lighted him to the door.

'It is a great consolation to have you to talk to her,' was the reply.

'Yes,' Mrs. Dorrien was saying over the evening fire, 'it is a long business, this life, so intricate, so perplexing; but

> 'Although the day be never so long,
> At last it ringeth to evensong.'

Why do we weary and grieve when we know that? As for me, I grieved so overmuch that I was lost in strange dreams; but they are gone, Grace; all is clear again now. I wish I could have escaped earlier, Grace; my dreams made your life so sad.'

'Never mind, dearie; they are gone now. All is bright and happy. Let us give thanks.'

'You never left me; you were always there, Grace, else I should have verily died or gone mad, I think. The comfort I have had in you, my dear! Yet when you were born I was sorry and angry, because you were not a boy. I was partial and unjust. I loved Geoffrey best and he was taken. Then I loved Laurie best and she left me. But you, my poor darling, you stood by me to the last; you were always true and kind and unselfish. The sacrifice should never have been accepted. It was too great. But I didn't know, darling, I didn't know, the dreams bewildered me so. All your youth, all your beauty and brightness, all wasted and gone.'

'Hush! don't cry, mother dear. Nothing wasted, only gone. We are quite happy and calm. Nothing troubles us now. The Old House is pleasant and peaceful. Let us talk of happy things. What does the clock tell us? Eleven. Ten is the usual bedtime.'

'You won't leave me till I sleep to-night, will you?' Mrs. Dorrien asked, when they reached her room, and all was found, or made, comfortable there.

So Grace sat, with a heart full of peace, by her mother's bed, holding the thin aged hand that clung so tightly to hers, watching the quietude of sleep take the worn and weary face to perfect peace, and thinking of the bitter sorrows and struggles that had left their trace on these quiet features. Something made her forgo her own rest; she feared to stir lest the unclasping of her hand should break that healing and heavenly sleep. Presently Sir Geoffrey's likeness to the still face became evident to the watcher; was it the effect of some dream? Then the beautiful young face beneath the Rape of Persephone seemed to gleam out from the aged features upon the pillow. 'What is youth and what is age?' she mused. Lady Grace had never lost her bloom; yet this grey, grief-worn woman was her only child, and she who watched with silver-streaked hair and long-lost hope and youth, her grandchild. Vanity of brief youth, vanity of brief age, vanity of sorrow itself, that comes and passes, like breath on a mirror. God is the only reality, the one grand permanence.

The room grew cold, while the oaken clock ticked the slow

night hours away; the watcher shivered in the feeble ray of the night light, but something told her not to go; an expectant mental stir precluded all desire of sleep.

Mrs. Dorrien moved and murmured in her dreams. She spoke of Hardwin, of Belwood, of her father, of her husband. Suddenly a shudder shook her wasted frame, a darkness spread over her face, she woke with a start and cry, and sat up.

'I must go,' she cried, 'they are coming at last. I must go to meet them, Grace; they are coming, they are all coming.'

Her arms were outspread, her upward, forward gaze into the darkness saw nothing visible to mortal eye; she fell back with a smile and a sigh; her gaze fixed, her sorrows ended.

Her daughter closed the eyes and knelt to pray for the passing soul, just as day was breaking and shadows fleeing.

Joy as well as sorrow was in her heart when she rose at last and looked upon the quiet face in its great peace, strangely conscious of the sweet young face in the picture at Hardwin, smiling over a new-born babe; conscious too of long pain ended and of a long task fulfilled, of the night's calm and the sweetness of yester-eve.

CHAPTER IV

SEVEN days later Grace Dorrien rose with a weary heart to face the empty day in the empty house.

In the sudden slackening of the long tension of many years there remained no sufficient reason for rising or doing anything; life had lost its mainspring. Everywhere her eyes vainly sought the grey head, the bent figure once so stately; her ears vainly listened for the thinned querulous voice and failing step; always she began some ministration no more needed by the frail form laid but yesterday to rest in the grave near the tower, some thought, some merry quip, some gay nothing to cheer and amuse the burdened heart for ever cold, and always she broke off in remembrance of her desolation. For so many, many years, every thought and action had been devoted to her mother, that it was hard to break the long habit; it was almost like trying to acquire an eighth sense.

People had been kind and sympathetic. Mrs. Cartmel had insisted on passing every night and much of every day at the Old House; she was not to be refused.

'My dear,' she said, 'it is not *right* for you to be alone. If

you prefer to have other friends, I will give way. But alone you cannot be. Mr. Cartmel will not hear of it.'

Yet even Mrs. Cartmel could not insist on staying on altogether. Wotton had tried hard to carry his cousin away to Newcourt, whither both the dowager and the young Lady Wotton had warmly wished to welcome her; but she had contrived to find a civil escape from that kindness. Bertram had called daily but had not been admitted. Why should her dreariness be inflicted on him?

He had followed his old friend uninvited to her last resting-place, standing by the plain hand-borne coffin, with Chip, the gardener, Lord Wotton, Mursell's husband, Barnes, and old Mr. Cartmel; a curiously assorted company. When they turned from the simple earthen grave, Lord Wotton walked back with Miss Dorrien to the Old House, Chip and Barnes paired off together, so that Bertram, left with Mr. Cartmel, offered the old gentleman his arm—a courtesy too welcome to be refused.

'Thankee, I'm rather shaky this morning. About time I was tucked up under the daisies myself, Bertram. I've attended poor Mrs. Dorrien this thirty year. Nearly all gone now, the old patients. It makes a man thoughtful, makes a man thoughtful. Well! poor woman, her troubles are over at last. An easy end, too.'

'What was it?' Bertram asked. 'I was calling the night before. She was very bright and chatty, but—there was something I didn't quite like about her; there was a change. I'd half a mind to suggest her seeing you. She was a little too flushed. Apoplexy?'

'Ay; that was it, effusion of blood on the brain. Quick and easy. I'm glad poor Miss Dorrien was spared a lingering illness. She's gone through quite enough with her mother, poor girl—girl I call her? She was that thirty years ago, and such a girl! Handsome and quick and clever, and full of life and fun. How do people live through these things, Bertram, eh? Wait till you've brought two generations into the world and helped two more out of it, and you'll know a thing or two. People talk of ghosts in the Old House. Well! well! There's been more than ghosts there to reckon with. Splendid health and courage that girl had, poor thing! Yet I wonder she didn't break down. Come in and sit a while with an old fellow, Bertram. What'll you take this raw day?'

'Still,' Bertram continued, when they were seated by the dining-room fire in the gathering dusk, 'Mrs. Dorrien was a fascinating

and well-informed woman. She must have been a delightful companion in her lucid intervals. And always so gentle.'

'*Not always*,' Mr. Cartmel replied with emphasis. 'By no means always. Mrs. Barnes, before she got her stroke, was always within call, or it couldn't have been allowed. My conscience pricked me sometimes as it was. But poor Miss Grace had such a way with her; she always mastered me. And I expect she was right. Well! it's over now, thank Heaven! I shouldn't say this to anybody, Bertram. My boys don't know even. They don't know half. But you seem to be a sort of relation. And you've no womenkind to worm things out of ee and chatter it all over the place.'

'What will dear Miss Dorrien do? Has she nobody to come to her and keep house with her?'

'Not a soul. Lord Wotton, a distant cousin, I believe, is her nearest relation. I fancy he pretty well kept them. It's his house. I often think he might have paid my bills. Not that I grudged attending 'em for nothing. I always liked 'em, and I expect it gave me a standing at Newcourt. Call and cheer her up, Bertram. But don't let people think you attend there. How are the St. Ann's folk? Nice and ill, thankee, eh? Not as ill as we could wish? Nasty healthy place, St. Ann's. Get in with the lodging-houses and hotels, my lad. Always good policy to attend parsons for nothing, mind.'

The morning after the simple burial — 'poverty-stricken' Barling folk called it—was clear and sunny with the freshness of hoar-frost. A robin tapped at the hall window, where Miss Dorrien was breakfasting alone. She could hardly bear it.

'Oh, Robin, don't you miss her?' she sighed, as she let the tiny guest in, and he cocked his little head with a knowing look, but pecked his crumbs as eagerly as ever, hopping on to a large blue letter that had been delivered that morning. A lawyer's letter evidently, their own lawyer's letter, Grace knew. She had not had the heart to open it; the contents might easily be divined: the winding-up of her mother's little estate. Yesterday's paper lay there still unopened; London papers arrived at Barling after midday, and were seldom delivered till next morning, unless people made special arrangements. Latterly, the papers had often gone unread at the Old House. Listlessly Grace unfolded the sheets, listlessly she glanced over the columns, until her gaze was arrested, her face and eyes flashed, as she read the heading—

'*Banquet to Lord Hilton of Khayala.*'

She had not even been aware that he was in England. There was bitter irony in the thought that, while she was bending in heart-broken desolation over the coffined face the men were waiting to cover from her sight for ever, *he* was being fêted and toasted, wearing his hard-won laurels, and responding to the congratulations and thanks of those who represented the country and the Queen he served. A sword of honour had been presented to him. She read the words with which it was offered, those with which it was received; she seemed to hear the well-known, well-toned voice, in those brief, terse thanks.

She saw the lance-like figure sitting there, enthroned as it were in light, among the greatest in the land, the guest of the evening, receiving homage and thanks; while she, alone and unfriended in cold and darkness, by the silent dead, was weeping her heart out. She saw the brilliant assembly, statesmen and soldiers, painters and princes, priests and peers, rise as one man to do him honour, their glasses uplifted in their hands, wine foaming and sparkling in the light. 'To Lord Hilton of Khayala,' sounded from all lips; all eyes were bent upon the hero of the hour, sitting calm and self-contained, decorations and medals flashing on his breast, while they drained their glasses and the thunderous three times three rolled round to the strains of 'See the Conquering Hero.'

Strangely different sounds in the Old House; dull sounds of a wooden lid screwed above all that loved her, dull sounds of restrained sobs from a breaking heart, dull sounds of stealthy footsteps descending the stairs with muffled tread; of careful opening and shutting of doors, as men left the dark and silent house of death. Strange division of lives that were to have been one; subtle, secret pain of perpetual parting on one side! And on the other? All she knew certainly was, that, five years after the farewell letter, he was still unmarried; the girl in India, to whom his inclination had seemed to point, married to a brother officer.

Step by step, the woman who loved him with undying passion, had followed his well-earned promotion, catching sight in papers from time to time of a name in six letters that ever shot an electric thrill through her frame, and made her read, with glowing pulses and strained attention, the slightest, shortest notice. An album lay in a locked drawer in her room full of such cuttings, neatly arranged in order, with dates, companioned by other relics of that brief and beautiful romance. Had he any such treasures?

Probably not; men are different; his life had been so full and stirring, so successful and happy. She was proud of his well-earned laurels; at each fresh record of his successes her heart throbbed gladly; she remembered that he had once loved her, the morning freshness of his heart had been hers. Perhaps he remembered sometimes as one remembers in dreams. If they should meet! That could scarcely be; they could only meet of set purpose, never by chance. Earlier in life she had often pictured such meetings; hope refuses to be slain; sorely wounded and starved, it drags out a weary life, catching at every crumb to stay its hunger and replenish its blood. Even now—he might see the death-notice and write some trite message of condolence, might even—the possibility was faint—call. It was too late, the hand-clasp, the one word, so many years desired, would now avail nothing; the calm friendship once hungered for would no more be possible. Yet in the breaking up of all the fountains of the heart such partings bring, there was wistful, instinctive turning to any and every earthly possibility of comfort.

She had dreamed of him that night, dreamed herself back from the sorrow and desolation of middle life to the lovely dawn of youth and love, where they two had been pacing some far-off golden shore, hand in hand, heart in heart; where he had faded to Maurice, and Maurice had changed back to him, and she had waked with the old superstition that their thoughts of each other became dreams. Yet she had been quite unconscious of what was befalling him on that festal evening, so sad to her forlorn self; the sweet superstition died of that certainty.

She rose at last and went up to the withdrawing-room, according to daily habit, to freshen the flower-vases and make all pleasant for the vanished presence. Presently Chip, working unnecessarily in the garden that he might beguile her into the fresh air or at least be there in silent companionship, was amazed, as was Mrs. Saunders in her kitchen, to hear dance-music steal out from the sunny window, but yesterday closed and close-blinded, in homage to the dead. Dance-music indeed, but sadder than any dirge, the old feeble 'Guards Waltz,' danced once so long ago, played upon the old faulty harp that had been the dead mother's. It ended in a rush of tears from many deep heart-springs, not of sorrow alone. The tears were dried, the harp shrouded in its cover; she went to the open sunny window, at last opening the prosaic lawyer's letter. The contents were easy to divine. She would have to pay off her own reversion to her mother's little property; Laura's share, diminished by misfortunes

and anticipation, would go to her husband, who had announced his intention of returning it to Grace. These things could not be done without some signing of legal documents.

But what is this? The letter shook in her hand, a crimson wave rushed over her face, and left it dead-white with dilating eyes. She passed her hand across her dazed vision; was she dreaming? Once more she perused the blue pages in the familiar writing of Mr. Dolliver, the head partner of Dolliver and Bradley, the well-known solicitors, and once more read the same incredible intelligence.

It was properly dated, addressed, and begun—'My dear Miss Dorrien,—I should in any case have waited upon you in the course of the next few days for the purpose of winding up the affairs of the trust. I shall now have to beg your attention to another and more important matter. I am in receipt of a communication from the solicitors of the late Mr. Hythe-Harbord of Hardwin Hall, whose only surviving son and heir, Mr. Reginald Hythe-Harbord, as you are no doubt aware, pre-deceased him by a few weeks. Mr. R. Hythe-Harbord dying, without issue, unmarried, and Mr. Brinson Hythe-Harbord having been unable to make a fresh will or even codicil, the whole of his property, real and personal, with the exception of certain specified bequests, passes to his next of kin. "Though the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceeding small."

'It has been ascertained beyond doubt that you, my dear Miss Dorrien, are the next of kin. Allow me, therefore, to congratulate you on at last coming into the princely inheritance to which you were born. You are now, probably, the richest woman in England. You possess Hardwin Hall with all its treasures of art, its noble libraries, its rare and costly curios, its family relics, its magnificent and extensive park, its splendid gardens and pleasaunces, and its widely spreading lands. The ground-rents of the great manufacturing centre of Harbordtown are yours, together with the adjacent mines, also several estates in other counties that you know of. I am simply indicating in a friendly way the chief sources of your enormous wealth. You will, of course, be properly inducted into your vast possessions in detail, as soon as the operations the law exacts can be carried out. Would that your revered mother had been spared a few years longer to enjoy the great wealth inherited and amassed by her father, who appeared to possess the powers of Midas and turn everything he touched to gold.

'A representative of the London firm of solicitors who drew up the late Mr. Hythe-Harbord's will, will, with your permission,

accompany me to Barling, early next week, for the purpose of acquainting you with full particulars of your splendid inheritance and asking your assistance in going through some preliminary legal forms. As I have stated above, a will dealing with property so enormous cannot be administered in a moment. The executors in the meantime will be glad to advance you, as also will the solicitors, any moneys you desire.—Trusting to have the pleasure of personally congratulating you before long, I remain, dear Miss Dorrien, yours very truly, HUMPHREY DOLLIVER.

'*pro* DOLLIVER AND BRADLEY.'

She looked round the faded room, with its few comforts, its worn and threadbare furniture, its fireless grate; she thought of yesterday's simple rite, the plain coffin, with the plain and worn pall, hidden by home-grown flowers, the scanty following behind the hand-borne bier; she thought of the long years of bitter privation, of comfortless, companionless seclusion, of forlorn, ever-baffled hope, of crushed pride and heavy wrong, endured by the cherished mother newly laid to rest; she thought of her own strenuous, and often futile, toils to lighten the poverty and brighten the joyless life of that beloved one; then she read again in the familiar script of the old family friend and legal adviser, the glowing description of the too great wealth that had come too late, and laid her arms on the window-sill, her head upon her arms, and wept long and bitterly—wept so that Chip, still pretending to work and still anxiously plotting to bring her out into the wholesome sunshine, heard the weeping and was afraid.

'She hadn't ought to be alone,' he complained to the serving-woman, 'Caint ee goo on up and bide long with her, Mrs. Saunders?'

'I hreckon I could, if I was vool enough, Seth Chip,' was the rejoinder.

'Goo on with ee vullishness, Anne Saunders! A ooman at your time o' life med hae zense enough to know she hadn't ought to be left.'

'A man at yourn med hae zense enough to bide quiet when he've no call to speak. Let her cry her fill and ease herself. A woman must cry when her heart's broke. 'Taint like men. Men is made that hard they wunt cry however bad they veels. So they sets up and growls and acts fullish instead.'

It was an hour later when Lord Wotton rode up to the door of the Old House.

'There ain't much the matter,' he heard, 'she ben upstairs a cryen this two hour. Your lardship med so well come on in.'

He came in accordingly, and went up the oaken staircase, deeply moved by the forlorn condition of the woman who had stirred the deepest pulse of his heart. His marriage was happy, his wife beloved—but—with a difference. Romance was not in that union of matured lives and mellowed minds, nor passion, nor poetry; it was an honest fireside feeling, based on mutual respect and esteem, cemented by mutual interests and the birth of children. Yet the first love remained, etherealised, remote, exalted, still the deepest chord in the symphony, that to which the *Leit-motiv* ever recurred. His wife had bid him go that morning in Heaven's name and bring Grace, if possible, to Newcourt.

'If not,' she added, 'at least stay some hours with her. She may find more comfort in seeing you without me than with me, Eustace.'

As he rode over the downs he remembered her young beauty with sad regret for her faded bloom. Why lament the natural result of time, in a world so fluctuant? If the sapling is beautiful, the oak is more so; the very decay of beauty is beautiful in its way. But men always have that feeling for the lost youth of women, especially of the women they love.

'Let her have her youth again—
Let her be as she was then,
Let her have her proud dark eyes
And her petulant quick replies;
Let her sweep her dazzling hand
With its gesture of command,
And shake back her raven hair
With the old imperious air——'

So thought the grizzled country gentleman, his breast overcharged with the latent poetry of life.

'May I come in?' he asked, holding the door ajar with a tremulous hand, his ear smitten by a sob that went to his heart.

Silence for a few seconds, as of some struggle for self-control, then a steady—

'Pray come in,' and he entered, remembering that day, also in late autumn, after her father's burial, when they had met alone and words so stirring and unforgettable had passed between them. She stood in full sunshine, a stately tragic figure in clinging folds of black, the ripple of her massive hair traced with faint silver lines, her face marked by tears, her deep dark eyes frank and clear with undying lustre. Her figure was still supple, well-developed, but not over-full, her bearing that of one accustomed to homage and unfettered movement. Suffering, tears, weariness,

nothing, could quench the spirit looking from those magnificent eyes, or spoil a type of beauty that could dispense with youthful bloom, charm of gaiety and enhancement of fair raiment. To the man whose youth and early manhood had been devoted to her she appeared a truly regal woman, not the faded, forlorn being her circumstances indicated.

'My *dear* cousin!' he cried, clasping the offered hand, then pausing long in fulness of heart and lack of words. 'You *must* take comfort,' he added presently, 'you must not be alone. Such a morning to spend in tears, Grace!'

'Why not? Well! if I had been dry-eyed this morning, Eustace—But sit down. How are they all at Newcourt?'

'Very sad and quite determined to have you with them. They hope you will come to-morrow for a week. You shall be quite alone, if you like, and only receive any of us when quite disposed. But we bargain that you walk or drive out every day.'

'Very kind, but quite mistaken. Now I want to tell you what has happened. Mr. Dolliver has written—'

'Yes? already? There's a letter for me too; I didn't open it, knowing what it was. I am very sorry to hear of these complications. Of the borrowed sums to pay off and all that. If I had known, if I had had the faintest suspicion of poor Cousin Caroline's embarrassments, I should have been but too glad—'

'We were already too much indebted to you. My dear mother was—' the voice broke a little—'proud, Wotton. Poor, poor mother! But oh! what breaks my heart is this,' she added, giving him the letter.

'By George!' he cried, after reading a few lines, 'I never thought of this. It never struck me that you were *his* next of kin. We gave him up after your grandfather's death. Wrote to him, met him no more. Dear Grace, this is glorious news, indeed. Of course you heard of Hythe-Harbord's death? It was in all the papers, and that poor Reginald's accident—just as well for him, probably. You know Reginald had no constitution; always ailing, never able to do as others do. I never met the poor fellow. They say that poor Pippin's death was a shock he never got over—My dear Grace, how truly delightful!' he added, pausing for very fulness of heart with tears of pleasure in his eyes. 'You at Hardwin, in your proper place. By George! Even old Dolliver goes off his head—'vast possessions,' 'wide-spreading lands,' 'richest woman in England,'—that dignified old family solicitor and head of the firm! Quite poetic! Ha! ha!'

Something in the deep steadfast gaze of his cousin checked this current of joyous congratulation. 'The richest woman in England' scarcely rose to her position, he thought. No doubt it was difficult to realise; no doubt her great bereavement was too fresh yet; that and the long, unnatural monotony of sadness would make the sanest mind morbid.

'The great thing is to get you out of this house of too many memories, dear Grace,' he said, becoming grave again. 'You will be another woman in other surroundings.'

'I cannot leave the Old House, Wotton,' she replied. 'It is home; it has been my only home for thirty years. You will stretch your kindness out a little longer and let me stay, won't you?'

'My dear cousin, what would I not do to please you? But is this poor old ruin a suitable home for the "richest woman in England"?—the owner of Hardwin Hall and goodness knows what else?'

'It is the only home for me,' she replied sadly; 'the home in which I have spent the greater part of my life. The Old House has become very dear to me, Eustace. To leave it would be to leave all the associations that I love, to pluck me up by the roots beyond all hope of re-planting. I am past fifty, remember. Oh! Wotton,' she added with sudden energy; 'do you think I could live in luxury when I remember what my dear, dear mother suffered all these years; when I think how bitter her privations were; how essential to her was wealth, or rather, what wealth gives? It was so hard *for her*. She was born and bred to those things and lost them just when shorn of all else. You cannot imagine what she endured. Oh! how I hate it all, this miserable money, these wretched possessions! All that foul mammon-heap that poisoned my grandfather's life and desolated my dear, dear mother's; all that wretched accretion of filthy lucre; all that foolish, wicked pride of possession—as if it were a glorious distinction, a noble virtue, to clutch and gather to oneself so many of the visible means of enjoyment; so much material beauty; so many of the lovely, rare, and precious things to be found on earth, on purpose to gorge one's miserable self with them! Who can see great accumulation of wealth without asking what rascality caused it—by what cruel means, by what crooked paths, it was amassed? Poor dear grandfather! I don't think him guilty of all that wealth; he didn't mean to be so rich; yet it became a curse to him, a curse to his daughter, a curse to us all. Most of all, a curse to poor miserable Brinson,

pining and dwining with his lost soul and his lost peace, among his gorged and choked money-bags, his over-flowing horns of treasure and beauty, that he could never possibly use or enjoy—or even keep. Cursèd be the lust of gold, Eustace! Cursèd be the fiend's pride of possession! Cursèd be the god of this world, the devourer of souls, the searer of hearts and consciences, the heartless Juggernaut, under whose cruel car-wheels all that makes life worth living, all that elevates humanity, is crushed and fouled in trodden mire! Cursèd be selfish lust of luxury, that sates and oversates itself on that which others are dying for lack of! Cursèd be the enjoyment of power and pride, that hardens men's hearts till they are past natural feeling! Cursèd be the luxury that creates unnatural wants and fosters unnatural living, thrice cursèd the wealth that plays upon the wants of the many to procure the unholy pleasures of the few; that fills our cities with styes, and builds palaces of sinful luxury above them! Cursèd be all greed, covetousness and selfishness!

'I will *not* accept this enormous inheritance—Eustace, there is a special curse upon it. I will *not* accept that of which my mother was robbed, and for the sake of which her heart was broken, her spirit maddened, her life ruined. There must be some legal process for getting rid of this great burden, Eustace. I will have it set going at once. Or I will say I am *not* next-of-kin to that most unfortunate man, and throw the whole thing into Chancery. But inherit that source of iniquity and misery I will not. Let Hardwin, beautiful, princely Hardwin, with all its noble halls and regal towers, all its galleries of painting and sculpture, its gilded theatres, its marble chapels, all its rare and precious treasures, its grand libraries and museums, its wide lands, its exquisite things, its parks and pleasaunces, be crushed, annihilated, and cast into the depths of the sea, before the curse upon it enters into another heart and corrodes another soul.'

CHAPTER V

'AFTER all,' Lord Wotton observed later, when relating to his wife (as all good men should) what occurred at this interview, 'it takes a woman, and a good one, to curse thoroughly and effectually. I was glad that my dear cousin was equal to the outburst. It must have done her a world of good. But to say that I was surprised would be grossly to understate the amaze-

ment with which I heard and witnessed the expression of her emotion. It threw me into a kind of stupor. I never saw human eyes blaze to that extent before. There were tones in her voice—deep chest-notes—that I had never suspected. There was something awe-inspiring in the look of her.'

'What did you reply, Eustace?' Lady Wotton asked with interest.

'Well, my dear, to tell the truth, I didn't know what to say, I was so stupefied. I probably looked like a fool. I certainly felt like one. Then, hearing the clock strike, I was inspired with a fine idea, and said rather feebly, "I'm awfully hungry, Grace, can you give me some luncheon?"'

'Dear Wotton,' Grace replied, 'I fear that I have been very inhospitable. It is but hermit's fare I can offer you——'

'At present,' Lord Wotton interpolated with latent meaning.

'I will see what Saunders can give us,' she continued; 'there has been so little occasion for food just lately. One seems to forget these trivialities.'

'So I imagined,' he replied, unheard by his hostess, who had left the room. 'I daresay,' he reflected, 'she hasn't dined for a week. Old Saunders has brought her a cup of tea now and then and coaxed her to have a slice of toast. No wonder she is overstrung and morbid. No fire at this time of year!'

When requested to descend to the dining-room, he found his cousin busy building a bright fire in the old-fashioned grate, a table set with old-fashioned china and glass, and very frugal fare. With great heroism he asked for the celebrated pink champagne, made of grapes grown in a sunny corner of the Old House. The ride home across the downs would be a fair antidote even to home-made wine. Besides, the gods are just: self-sacrifice must meet with a reward.

'A pity old Cartmel is breaking up,' he said presently; 'he can't be any great age. I was quite struck by his aged looks yesterday.'

'He has lived a hard life, Wotton. And he was much attached to my dear mother, and felt her loss keenly. I saw that he was greatly affected yesterday. But, you know, he leaves all the hard work to his son now. And another son, one of the youngest children, is coming home soon, when fully qualified. Then Mr. Cartmel will retire.'

'I wonder if he has put money by? I am inclined to doubt it. Country doctors are very poorly paid, and Cartmel had so many children. His practice would be chiefly among farmers

and village tradespeople. Newcourt was a certain small income; the Old House, I suppose, another.'

'The Old House? My dear Wotton,' cried Grace, a sudden thought crimsoning her face; 'he never had a penny from the Old House. He knew that our circumstances were too narrow for that.'

'Did he never send in a bill? If only I had known—I would have rectified that omission. I suppose there were not many weeks without a visit from poor old Cartmel?'

'Not many days of late,' she replied. 'Mr. Cartmel has indeed been a friend to us. Dear old man, I never looked upon his visits as anything but friendly. Do you know, Wotton, it never struck me that he ought to have been paid for his trouble I should as soon have thought of feeing cousin Emma and yourself for calling. When there was anything wrong, one of course sent for Mr. Cartmel. What more natural? Then, of late years, he took to appearing periodically like the postman, and heard what was wrong and tried to set it right.'

'Thirty years,' mused Lord Wotton. 'Let us put it at fifty pounds a year; that would be fifteen hundred, and at five per cent. simple interest—h'm—turn into a Board School and ask the first boy how much it comes to. Poor old chap! I wonder how he managed to educate all those boys and girls of his. I wonder if Barnes pays him. Mursell has a good deal of doctoring, poor soul, I suppose. What is money but dirt? Still, it's a handy kind of dirt—to a man with a family, Grace. How is Mursell?'

'Dear Mursie! of course she is broken-hearted, but not more ill than usual.'

There was no further reference to the inheritance that day. Two whole days elapsed, and then on the third, Lord Wotton again rode over to the Old House to luncheon, to the gratification of Chip and Saunders, who confided to him their fears that the ceremony of luncheon would be omitted but for his presence.

Grace brightened at his coming and welcomed him cordially. The conversation between the cousins turned upon money and acres, which, Lord Wotton at once admitted, are but filth. But he averred that this particular species of filth is not only extremely serviceable to mankind, but carries obligations and duties with it, its right and just and kind distribution being a matter of great moment.

'Manure,' he observed, 'is dirty stuff, but not without value. I had a heavy bill for some this morning. The application of it

to proper soils and plants, I am told, is a matter of long study and experience. It appears to be deleterious to some things at some seasons, and an absolute necessity or a great help to other things at other seasons.'

The truth of this proposition was not denied; there was a brief pause in the conversation, during which the richest woman in England removed the ripened head of a sunflower from its stalk—for the cousins were pacing one of the broad turf garden-walks—and placed it in a dry cleft to mature its seed.

'The responsibilities of such a grand inheritance as yours,' Lord Wotton presently added, 'are enormous, the duties——'

'Far beyond my feeble powers,' she replied, picking off the seeds from a hollyhock stem and flinging them on a rubbish-heap as they passed, 'I am wholly unfitted for spreading that kind of manure, Wotton, greatly as I admire your fragrant simile.'

'Dear Grace, people cannot transfer their responsibilities and duties to others,' he remonstrated. 'Besides, you were born to this; you will but return to your natural place in coming into this great inheritance. And who is fitter for an adorned life, a life of influence, power, leisure and splendour than yourself? Oh! how bitter it has been to us all, to see you wasting your great talents, your unusual beauty and unrivalled social charm and ability in this sad and solitary place! How you loved Hardwin; how you appreciated its fine proportions, its artistic charm and beauty; how able and intelligent was your description of the noble architecture, of the paintings, the marbles, the decorations; how well you could carry out your grandfather's artistic aims; how fitted you are to add to his collections! Then what scope for large-minded philanthropy among that swarming industrial and mining population; what a city you might make of Harbordtown; what charities you might found and aid!'

'Born to it, Wotton? Ah, yes, but I was born so long ago,' she replied, with a sad smile. 'The quiet life and homely tasks here have changed me and unfitted me for the splendours and dignities of life. You speak of my capacities with affectionate poetic licence. But, though I was never half what you say, I admit that I could have filled such a position as you indicate, and should have loved it. I was no fool; society and culture were equally charming to me; influence and power I liked more than most women do; pleasure as much as any. I have fretted and rebelled against my lot here, I grant; but I have grown to love it, I am rooted to this soil by long standing. I have become half savage in the long solitude. I couldn't even walk into a room

properly now. Face to face with a crowd of civilised people I should be frightened to death, and as shy as any school-girl. I shouldn't know how to dress even; I could pick up no shibboleth. I should be uneasy at the head of a large and sumptuous household. And I should grieve at every moment because *she* could never enjoy, as she could and ought to have enjoyed—the luxury, elegance, and dignity of such an atmosphere—her birthright and native element. Hardwin would be hateful to me; it has been desecrated by the iniquity and misery of years—it is haunted by miserable memories. My grandfather meant it for poor Brinson, who meant it for any one but me. It would never seem mine—though I always felt that it was naturally mine, and would actually be mine one day. But even if I could care for the things wealth brings now, what pleasure is there in solitary enjoyment? The terms are contradictory. A happiness unshared is no happiness. I am alone—Oh! so very, very much alone—my poor darling mother has been my all since little Laurie went—You can't think, no man can think, how bitterly, how utterly alone a woman can be, Wotton. No man could be so alone: *Mutter-seelen-allein*, the Germans say. Such solitude would be but mocked by a wealth once necessary to the happiness of the beloved dead.'

'Grace, Grace,' he cried, tortured and heart-wrung, 'it stabs me to hear you say this, you whom I worshipped, you for whom I would have died! Dear Grace, your heart, your loving, loyal, filial heart, is all freshly torn and bleeding from this fresh bereavement, which time will soften and soothe, even heal. Don't do anything rashly, dear. You will feel and think so differently in the future, perhaps a few weeks, certainly a year, hence. You will form new ties.'

'A woman forms no new ties after fifty, no strong ties.'

'Ah! dear, you mistake. You are so beautiful, so fascinating; years have no power on you——'

'Eustace, this is nonsense,' she broke in, flushing and nearly crying; 'quiet friendships one may form at any age, but—old wine is best.'

'Here is old wine, Grace. When did my friendship ever for a moment waver? Is it nothing to you?'

'It is much; I am not ungrateful,' she sighed. Much indeed, far too much and far too warm for safety: friendship so perilously near warmer feelings must to any right-minded woman ever have more pain than pleasure. 'Then, Wotton, true friends can only be won by poor people, at least after fifty. The "richest woman in England" would be surrounded by parasites and distrustful of

friends. A humble market-gardener might win esteem, nothing warmer, for herself alone.' She smiled a singular smile as she said this; it perplexed Lord Wotton, who had never yet been able to fathom his cousin. Why should she call herself a market-gardener?

'The few friends I possess,' she added, 'are here. Yourself to begin with, Louisa and cousin Emma. Mr. Cartmel, Mursie and Chip. And—Maurice Bertram.'

'Cartmel, Mursie and Chip. And young Bertram.—By the way, I wish I could do something for your *protégé*, Grace; but I can't give up Cartmel and his son. No doubt Bertram will make his way at St. Ann's if there's any stuff in him.—Of course it's very natural to be attached to people who have served you so faithfully and so long. But to mew yourself up in an owl's nest for life, for the sake of their society. You could carry them all about with you, for that matter. And the intellects, the personages, the geniuses, the reputations you might surround yourself with! Well! I must be off. May Louisa and the children come the day after to-morrow? By the way, what do you propose to live on in the preposterous contingency of giving up your inheritance?'

'As before, I have my small pension as a colonel's daughter. The gardening will do the rest, and the poultry and eggs and honey and home-made wines—the celebrated pink champagne and the Barling port-elderberry, vintage '84. St. Ann's offers a ready market for these things. Chip's pony carries them for a small percentage.'

'Good heavens, Grace! you can't mean to say that you *sell* these things?'

'Your lordship, I am told, sells pheasants. Are fowls and pigeons so different? It is true that the land is yours, and that the manure comes from your farm. But we might make an exchange: the Old House for Hardwin Hall would be no robbery. You know, Wotton, you are my next-of-kin. What I mean to propose to Mr. Dolliver is to draw-up some instrument in the nature of a will, a deed of gift, giving during life instead of bequeathing at death. It would be a great triumph to avoid these enormous death-duties. Suppose I took this property and died in a year or two without a will, you would come in to everything, to all the real property, certainly. Therefore it will only be anticipating for you to take it now.'

'My dear cousin, I cannot follow your reasoning; your intentions I perceive to be most amiable. May I ask for how long you have provisioned the town of St. Ann's? Oh, Grace, if I

had but known your need! It was a magnificent thing to do. But—to think that all these years you have been toiling like—like——'

'Adam. Don't you know, Wotton, that gardening is the natural occupation of mankind? It is the universal pastime. It is most healthy and most poetic in its way. The exquisite mornings I have spent here—the silence, the dewy fragrance, the music of daybreak, the gradual glorious awakening of all nature! The flush of dawn, when the sky quivers and palpitates with changing splendours, like a living being; now one vast, varicoloured shell, now a chrysolite streaked with long bars of rose-bloom, melting to gold and primrose; the vivid beauty of the first beams, when the sun leaps out of the sea; the soft waking warble and gradual full chorus of song-birds, the strange, wild cry of sea-gull and plover, the soft withdrawal of shadow and mist, slow passing of hoar frost and grey dews—but I rave! Ah, Wotton, my life has not been all sad. I have had hours of vivid enjoyment, passages of exquisite beauty. To this out-door work I may owe my excellent health. What else I may have lacked in life, I have at least possessed that fundamental blessing.'

Lord Wotton cantered home that afternoon with an aching heart; 'life not all sad, hours of vivid enjoyment, passages of exquisite beauty,' rang in his ears to the rhythmic thud of hoofs. There is no surer test of what people lack than their joy in what they have. He thought of what her life might have been as his wife, loved, cherished, honoured, surrounded by all the world can offer, shedding joy around her, a social queen, yet with all fireside virtues. Or as Ormonde's wife, or as Dover's, conferring new splendour upon strawberry-leaves, enhancing the lustre of a coronet, a superior and virtuous Lady Blessington, a more charming and spiritual Madame de Récamier, a Madame Roland, with saner politics and saving common-sense.

'And then the tears of blood arise
Up from my heart into my eyes,
Oriana!'

It was with great joy that Wotton conveyed the subsequent intelligence of Mr. Dolliver's timely attack of gout to the Old House, a few days later. That often useful malady would serve in this case to give Miss Dorrien time to reflect, even time to recover in some measure from the first bitterness of her sudden bereaval, before taking irrevocable steps; it would also give the sagacious family lawyer leisure to marshal arguments and facts, and present legal difficulties to the consideration of his client.

he would not be paralysed by such amazement as had stricken Lord Wotton, at all events. Mr. Dolliver fully perceived the expedience of nursing his gout; but being obliged to recover before very long, or send a representative to the Old House in the interim, he judged it wiser to choose the first alternative.

Bertram had called daily at the Old House, always receiving the same message, that Miss Dorrien could see no one, and required no help in anything.

'Reckon she'll see ee presently,' Mrs. Saunders was wont to say to mitigate his disappointment. 'Terrible lonesome for her. Poor missus was one to want a deal of looking after, and she 'll find the miss of it more and more.'

Some ten days after the loss he called at dusk, and was allowed to find his way up the oak stairs into the withdrawing-room, where Grace was sitting in shadow, opposite the empty chair. She said something about the kindness of coming to a house so sad, but he seemed not to take it in. He bent to kiss the offered hand, took a low seat near her, and waited a minute. Then he turned and burst out with—

'I did so love her!'

At this, the fountains were unsealed; there was a great outpouring of memories and traits, and a long, long discussion, that left the bereaved heart softened and lightened, and he knew that he would not again be refused admission.

'You have hardly had time yet to think what you will do, Miss Dorrien,' he said some days later; 'but you ought not to remain here just now, in these dark winter days.'

'I have quite decided it all, Maurice. There is and can be no change in my life, except the great solitude that has fallen upon it.'

He looked into the deep dark eyes, wanting to say things, but fearing to be presumptuous.

'Surely Cartmel won't *let* you stop here alone,' he said at last.

'He wouldn't if he could help it, dear old man, but he can't.'

'Is there no one you could have to stay with you, at least during the winter?'

'Mursie is to be brought over, bed and all, for a few weeks. In the meantime there will be some winding up of my mother's affairs. They are rather tangled; there are debts to discharge. Very little will remain; but my wants are few. Besides, the garden is the main source of income.'

'Oh, Miss Dorrien,' he exclaimed, 'how brave you are! But how I wish you could be independent of such a necessity!'

'Is it so well to be independent, Maurice? What interest should I have in life without that necessity? These simple lives are not the least happy, my dear.'

'But *you*—you are not made for such simplicity, dear Miss Dorrien,' he cried. 'It is not because I know that you were born to higher things, believe me; it is what you *are*, what one cannot help seeing, of rare culture, of remarkable capacity, of unusual charm and fascination. It is not for me to say these things, but one can't help it sometimes.'

Miss Dorrien laughed with a gaiety that surprised him.

'Am I *all that*, Maurice?' she asked. 'Or is it that my young knight is given to idealising his friends? After all, not a bad quality to possess on this prosaic old planet. Don't idealise too much. If you try to live too long in the moon, you fall too suddenly to the ground, and in poetic parlance come a cropper. But I do hope you are making some younger and brighter friends, who require less idealising.'

'I shall never have one for whom I care more.'

'Not this week, perhaps, or next week, or the week after, but very soon, dear, I hope. And how goes the practice? Is St. Ann's paved with gold?'

'Not yet. I wish we could get it paved with something better —asphalte or concrete. It might be a grand health-resort. To tell the truth, the practice isn't first-class. It's a blessed sell. But one ought to be able to make a practice for oneself. I've been up three nights running, and that's something. The curate of St. Simon's has whooping-cough, that is, his three children have. One is going to die. Then a German governess at Box, the draper's, is down with fever; and I have several shopmen and shopwomen with influenza; and a lot of very suspicious sort of sore throat among Board School children. A builder's apprentice has gone and smashed himself in a most interesting manner. A Wesleyan minister has clergyman's throat —like his cheek—and a maid-of-all-work has housemaid's knee— like her's. This is what comes of ambition. Isn't that a fine catalogue of ills to batten upon?'

'Truly delightful. But will these poor people be able to pay for these amusements?'

'Gracious goodness! Not one of the lot will pay—except, perhaps, the shopmen and women, if they recover, which is doubtful. But I hope to get a club appointment soon. Three

shillings a year for each member. There's an El Dorado. Unluckily, I find the physic: that is, if I 'm lucky enough to get the appointment. But you see it 's such a glorious thing to have a certain income to fall back upon.'

'Magnificent. But—pardon my commercial spirit—suppose that each member of your club has two bottles of medicine a year at eighteen-pence each, what profit will remain?'

'And suppose that they had three apiece. It 's the honour of the thing, you see. But the members are all youngish men in good health when admitted, so they are supposed to pay for each other by their small subscription, and to employ the club doctor for their wives and children, which they seldom do. There are several candidates for the post, all busily canvassing Physic is a fine liberal profession, dear Miss Dorrien.'

'It is, indeed. But, my poor child, have you *no* paying patients?'

'Yes, a well-to-do farmer at Estridge, and the owner of a smart yacht at St. Ann's. Rome wasn't built in a day.'

Nor was Bertram's bill paid in a day, or a year, or ten years. The yacht owner, Count Something unpronounceable, sailed away as soon as he got better, leaving no address. The farmer, two years later, spoke of bad harvests and hoped for better times. Mr. Cartmel told Bertram that he had attended him for years and once got a few pounds on account.

'How glad I am,' Miss Dorrien said in the course of these confidences, 'that I know what it is to struggle and work for nothing, when one wants bread—and butter—else I could have no true fellow-feeling for those who do.' Then it was that Bertram heard of her essays in the liberal arts of painting, poetry and fiction, and of the repugnance with which she at first took to commerce, as well as of her later delight in the industrial part of it. She heard in return of his first paying patient, Mr. Hythe-Harbord.

'It was pretty big fish to net, wasn't it?' he said. 'I was assistant to a Dr. Hoad, a man in large practice in a town about fifteen miles from Hardwin. Driving in that direction, one day, I found a gentleman on a hedgebank in a lonely road, in great pain. His horse, he said, had bolted and thrown him. His groom had gone after the horse. I found a sprained ankle, which I treated at once: cut the boot off, put a bandage on. Then I asked where I could drive him, and was told to Hardwin Hall. I didn't know it was the millionaire himself. I wish I had. I might have got out some pincers and made him write me

a four-figure cheque on the spot, like those wealthy barons of old, who, when they caught a rich Jew, gave him a good roasting or drew his teeth one by one, till he came out with his broad pieces, his angels and rose-nobles. However, I shot my gilded rubbish —that is, Mr. Hythe-Harbord—at his—portal—biggest word I can think of—and drove away. I had told him who I was, and how I thought of buying a practice near St. Ann's. Picture my surprise next morning when I got a letter of introduction to Lord Wotton and other people in the county, and a ten-pound note, with Mr. Hythe-Harbord's compliments and thanks. Poor man, he died some weeks ago—but not of my treatment. I wonder who will have his millions?'

'I can but rejoice in my poverty, Maurice, if that is the treatment you think proper for millionaires. I am on the whole glad that you don't regard me as "gilded rubbish." What about the New Year's ball at St. Ann's?'

'Very mixed. It will be awful fun. And I 'm asked to lecture to the St. John's Ambulance. That won't be bad fun either. Lots of pretty girls will have to be shown how to bandage limbs and improvise tourniquets. My name will be in the *St. Ann's Argus.* I shall soon be an old inhabitant, a sort of St. Ann's institution, like the parish pump—which ought to be shut up. I 'll tell you all about the ball next day, if I may come to tea?'

He duly appeared in the Old House at tea-time on the day after the ball. There he found Mr. Cartmel, who had more important news to impart.

In the meantime, Mr. Dolliver's gout being well, he had appeared at the Old House with Mr. Hythe-Harbord's solicitors, and listened with great patience to his client's proposition that he should execute an instrument devising the whole of her inheritance to all and sundry without delay. To do that, the men of law told her, would be impossible until she had gone through the legal forms necessary to take possession of it; people cannot give what is not theirs. There had been long debates at the Old House during the three days these people passed at Barling, many difficulties had been raised and much quiet resistance offered to her scheme. Some weeks later, Mr. Dolliver had appeared at Barling, alone, and very movingly remonstrated with her. She had listened with great courtesy and attention without suffering her purpose to be altered a hair's-breadth. The two representatives of each firm had then joined forces, and together assailed her intentions, when it became clear to them that Miss Dorrien's mind was fully made up, and that she was acting on

matured conviction, not on rash impulse, so that the situation must be faced.

Things were in this transitive state on New Year's Day, when Bertram went to tea at the Old House and found Mr. Cartmel there before him.

'And I wanted to be first-foot in the Old House and wish you a Happy New Year,' he complained.

'I was just asking Miss Dorrien to guess my news,' Mr. Cartmel said, rubbing his hands together and softly chuckling; 'I made Ralph drive me into Oldport this morning to make sure it was true, and we bought Mrs. Cartmel a fur cloak on the strength of it.'

'Something jolly good, then?' Bertram asked.

'Something jolly good and no mistake, Bertram. Come, Miss Dorrien, one more guess.'

'Mr. Ralph made physician to the Queen? No? Mr. James winning great distinction? Dear Mr. Cartmel, my brain is exhausted with conjecture. Do tell me.'

'You'd never guess, never,' cried the old gentleman with a catch in his voice. 'As Mrs. Cartmel says, it's quite a romance, it would do to put in a story-book.'

'Isn't he tantalising, Maurice? Dear Mr. Cartmel, do please gratify our curiosity.'

Mr. Cartmel, sitting in the full blaze of the hearth, with the lamp behind him, tried to speak and could not, the tears rushed into his eyes and rolled down his rough, weathered face instead.

'It's—it's—such a relief,' he gasped at last, putting up a veined and wrinkled hand to shade his face, while Bertram looked from one to the other in some alarm; 'a—a—*gift*—of—*can't* be true! —four—thousand—p—pounds!' His voice died quite away, there was silence for a few seconds. Miss Dorrien's tears were flowing; Bertram was affected by the old man's emotion.

'Lodged,' continued Mr. Cartmel hoarsely, 'in my name at the bank at Oldport. My old woman and I—needn't worry—any—more.'

'Dear Mr. Cartmel,' said his hostess, rising and softly pressing a kiss on the old man's forehead, 'I congratulate you with all my heart. I trust you and dear Mrs. Cartmel will have many Happy New Years, and a long and peaceful old age together.'

'Hurrah!' cried Bertram, grasping his hand, 'I never heard better news in my life, sir.'

'It's such—such—a—relief,' repeated Mr. Cartmel, drying his [illegible]ears with the back of his hand; 'such—a—blessed relief.'

CHAPTER VI

IT is quite possible that many Barling folk may have read in the papers of the disposition of Brinson Hythe-Harbord's property; of the huge total of it, and the few minor bequests, with the whole enormous residue to his only son, Reginald. Also of that residue passing, in consequence of the son's premature death, to his next-of-kin, Grace Harbord Dorrien, only surviving child of Clarence Dorrien and Caroline his wife, without connecting the fortunate heiress with their own Miss Dorrien, who lived alone with ghosts and poverty at the Old House. Still less would they know anything of the subsequent disposition of the Hythe-Harbord property, effected, after much disputation, by its present owner. Lord Wotton, as silent on the subject as his cousin and the solicitors and executors, was known to have acquired large estates in the north, in consequence of which he now passed less time at Newcourt each year. Mursell knew all about it; but, besides being cannily reticent, she had, in her condition, small opportunity for gossip; nor did she communicate much even to her husband, who was content to know that the death of a member of Mrs. Dorrien's family had brought her a handsome legacy, far beyond his expectations. He had married Mursell, as he often told her, for her goodness and household skill, and had never repented, not even when the good soul was laid low and ruled by deputy from her bed.

Even Bertram, had he chanced to see to whom the Hythe-Harbord millions had fallen, would only have been struck by the singular, and to him ironical, coincidence of the name, Grace Dorrien; of Harbord, in connection with the Old House, he knew or remembered nothing.

On the Easter Eve following Mrs. Dorrien's death, many Barling ladies were gathered together in a large chamber, near the church, called the Parish Room, which smelt of evergreens and flowers, and was strewn with leaves and twigs and litter from the decorations. Some ladies were young, some were in the first suspicion of losing youth, others were frankly middle-aged and claimed their privileges; all were tired, all had stained fingers, many were dowdy, most untidy. Evening was closing in with a snow-fall, the bare chamber, made to look barer by illuminated texts and Biblical prints, was somewhat cheered by a blazing fire; the perfume of a huge pot of tea, poured into thick parish cups,

asserted itself above the headachy odours of broken greenery and crushed primroses. The tired ladies sipped the hot drink and gathered cosily round the hearth, their hearts expanding, small irritations and petty jars vanishing in momentary comfort. Snowed-in, the only plan was to make the best of the opportunity; tongues were loosened; laughter was heard.

'Thank goodness,' a tall girl, in a sailor hat and crimson flannel blouse, was saying, as she partly sat on a corner of the long wooden table, swinging one leg and resting on the other; 'Lent is done, and Holy Week over. I can bike again next week. My bicycle has been in the stable ten mortal days. I do think it hard lines to be a parson's daughter. Margery has been biking every blessed day this week. Mabel, if you don't mean to attend to that teapot, chuck it over to me. Miss Ormsby wants some tea.'

'Oh, hang it all! Beg pardon, Miss Ormsby,' returned another tall girl, in charge of the huge teapot. 'I say, let 's have a bike paper-chase on Tuesday. The last was ripping. Ten of us collided in the lane coming off the down, and fell one on top of the other. Gladdie smashed her handle-bar; she was the bottom one. Ralph Cartmel came upon the heap of us, and nearly tumbled off his horse with laughing. He said we were all legs; he couldn't see one blessed head among us.'

'My dear,' cried Miss Ormsby, 'how excessively improper'— a remark that would have at once transferred Miss Ormsby, if the lines in her face had been less visible than they were, from the golden youth of to-day to a paler, thinner youth, in the dark forgotten sixties and seventies.

'Not a little bit improper,' returned Miss Mabel; 'we were rigged for spills, of course. Why don't you make your aunt ride, Margery? We'll teach you, Miss Ormsby; Gladdie and I and Margery. You shall have the middle machine; one of us will push it behind, and the other two give you a hand apiece. You'll have nothing to do but just stick on. You'd ride light,' critically surveying her through her *pince-nez*, 'and soon learn to go the pace.'

'I should rather teach her golf, Margery,' interposed Gladdie, the damsel perched on the table corner; 'it would take less out of her. After all, wheels aren't in it with golf. The Estridge links are ripping.'

'I don't know that I care about her athletics,' said Margery, very seriously. 'As long as she knows her catechism, does her needle-work, and behaves nicely when taken out to tea, an aunt——'

'Margery, my dear Margery!' interrupted the subject of the discussion. 'What *are* you talking about?'

'And only speaks when spoken to,' Margery continued severely.

'Shut up, Margery,' cried Miss Gladdie, reddening and bounding off the table, upsetting her tea with a softly-murmured swear-word. 'She's chaffing us, Miss Ormsby. When *is* this rotten snow going to leave off?'

The two Miss Hanleys, who lived in one of those nice clean stuccoed villas on the new road, were very much alike, but one was so much less beautiful than the other that Gladdie and Mabel Heathcote called them Beauty and the Beast, their sponsors having named them Beatrice and Barbara. They had once been young, and though the world had forgotten it they had not. Poor Miss Beast, as those young wretches called the younger Miss Hanley, was afflicted with a nose of perennial crimson, ascribed by Miss Beauty—that is, Beatrice—when out of temper, to tight-lacing and sloth. This feature was to Miss Beast as the wrath of Achilles to the Greeks, a source of numberless woes. So dire were the poor lady's sufferings, on this score, that she once resorted to the extreme measure of consulting Mr. Cartmel on the possibility of toning down the too brilliant tint. He—one regrets to have to relate of a fundamentally kind-hearted man—only laughed, and told her that it was no use to be vain at her time of life. Of course she could not forgive this, so, falling into the clutches of influenza shortly after, she sent for a St. Ann's doctor. But she always bowed to Mr. Cartmel when she met him, though he did not always perceive this act of courtesy.

'We have lived at Roselands for nearly twenty years,' Miss Beauty Hanley was saying, 'but never once have we met her—never once has she taken part in any parish work. I met the mother on the down one day. She appeared to be alone, though Miss Dorrien was near, and I thought it pleasanter to speak. My dear, I wish you could have seen her face. A veritable Niobe—wasn't it Niobe who turned people to stone with her glaring eyes, Barbara? They say she led her poor daughter an awful life.'

'Yes,' returned plump and cheerful little Mrs. Besson, who lived in another new stucco villa; 'she was a dreadful person. It is supposed that she had done something, and could not face society. Perhaps that is why neither of them ever took part in any parish work. What a relief to her poor daughter her death must be!'

'Poor thing,' added Miss Barbara Hanley, 'what a dreary

life. Think of all the long dark winter evenings alone in that empty, rat-haunted house. Dear Mrs. Besson, what a charitable work it would be to bring Miss Dorrien into Barling society. Couldn't some of us call—on the pretext of asking her to join some of the parish societies?'

'Nonsense, Barbara,' retorted Miss Beauty; 'that is the duty of Mrs. Heathcote or the rector. If they—and I know they call regularly—could bring her into the work, *then* we might draw her into our circle. There is nothing like activity and usefulness to cheer people up. Society is quite necessary to keep the brain properly stimulated. She ought not to be left to mope alone.'

'I don't know that Miss Barbara's idea is not a good one,' Mrs. Besson mused aloud. 'Suppose, now, we were to call and ask her to join our needlework guild? Such an opportunity for her to glide gently into society. Such a fit season to begin a new life—Easter and spring. Well connected, too. A distant cousin of the Earl of Wotton. The Countess sometimes calls there. It's Lord Wotton's house.'

'And six months' deep mourning got over,' added another lady. 'Of course, at first she would rather be alone.'

'Of whom were the Miss Hanleys talking, Aunt Julia?' Margery asked, when they were making their way home through the dim, snowy street under a misty Easter moon.

'Of the Old House people, the Dorriens. There was something very queer about Mrs. Dorrien, who evidently had lived a great deal in the world. That, I suppose, shut the poor, devoted daughter out of everything. They were cultivated, well-informed women, I hear. But now—I wish I had an excuse to call. They never called at the Grange, where we have been this ten years. And where we shall certainly arrive too late for dinner to-night, unless we make more haste. But, my dear Margery, I am beginning to think these Heathcotes anything but fit companions for you. Fast, slangy girls, they seem. What would your father think?'

'Oh, he does not care; he likes me to mix with all sorts of girls. He doesn't want me to be either narrow or priggish. He says that I am old enough now to stand by myself, and not take my tone from others. Besides, Auntie, there is no harm in the girls. They like to be thought up-to-date and smart, that's all.'

'And patronise their elders, Margery?'

'That is up-to-date style. Papa says it's now the fashion for young people to condescend to the old—when they don't snub them.'

'Does he wish his daughter to be up-to-date?' asked Miss Ormsby grimly.

'Don't you know my father yet, Aunt Julia? He says that this bad-manner phase will pass away, and politeness become a mark of good breeding again. Is this the Old House? Then it must have been Miss Dorrien herself.'

This cryptic phrase—lost upon Miss Ormsby in the anxiety of passing down a steep lane overshadowed by trees quite moon-proof—referred to an incident of the preceding day, when Margery, coming home from church alone in a sleety spring rain, had overtaken another worshipper, who, in springing out of the path of a crooked Good Friday scorcher, slipped upon some half-melted sleet on the curb-stone and fell, while the cycler, his nose glued to his handle-bar, flew on, reckless of the devastation in his path. Margery helped the lady to rise, saw that she was lamed, and gave her an arm, holding her own umbrella over both; the injured lady used hers as a walking-stick, and appeared to be in too much pain to speak, till they reached the Old House, when she thanked her and bid her 'Good-morning,' saying that she was now at home. Margery had scarcely been able, in the grey wild weather, to take much count of the appearance of the injured lady, whose features were so disguised by pain that she would certainly not have recognised her again in the street. It now occurred to her that she ought to have called to inquire—an omission that she resolved to rectify next day, which was Easter Sunday.

'*Why* won't you come in for luncheon?' Gladdie asked Margery on the Easter forenoon, when the three girls came out of church in the clear sunshine and keen wind, that had driven both sleet and snow away.

'Another day, thanks, Gladdie.'

'Oh, get out, you bloated aristocrat,' cried Mabel, giving her a vigorous push that nearly knocked her down in the midst of the grave congregation streaming through the churchyard. '*We* don't want you in your go-to-meeting gown.'

The bloated aristocrat, who was smaller and slighter than her athletic friends, acquaintances of her school-days, floated lightly through the windy street from one end of Barling to the other, and stopped at the door of the Old House. She was raising the heavy and ancient knocker, when her eye was caught by a card attached to it, bearing the inscription, evidently not there for the first time, 'Open and come in.'

This she did, pausing on the threshold, immediately opposite

the open doorway into the hall, through which bright sunshine poured across the room. Her figure was in full relief against a background of opposite garden wall, her face was outlined upon blue sky. Dazzled by this light and the sunshine she had been facing in the street, she found the dining-room except for this lane of light, a blank darkness, out of which Henry the Eighth and the Tudor lady very slowly emerged, and, more slowly beneath them, the large square sofa on which Bertram had come-to so long ago. On this lay a tall figure surrounded by books and papers; thence slightly rose a face with dark, deep eyes and a firm sweet mouth.

'Pray come in,' Margery heard; 'it is my friend-in-need of Friday, surely.'

Margery stood blushing and hesitating. Grace saw a young thoughtful face, with dark grey eyes and light brown hair, gold-edged; a slender, undeveloped figure, promising to be graceful, was dressed in a fresh, fashionable spring costume, long, well-gloved hands held a prayer-book on which a gilt cross was conspicuous. Something in this sunlit vision of youth, especially something in the blushing face and frankly smiling mouth, went to Grace's heart; a breath, almost a voice, from her own youth, seemed to penetrate the dark low-browed room with the voice of this young stranger.

'I came to inquire—surely this *is* Miss Dorrien?' the latter said, shutting the heavy, iron-studded door that had been so cruel and so kind to Bertram, and coming up to the sofa. 'I hope you were not really hurt by that horrid crooked scorcher?'

'Only bruised and twisted,' she replied, enfolding the young guest in a long, loving gaze. 'Pray sit down, my dear; you are most welcome. I am in prison on this sofa by medical orders, as you see. My servant is out for the day, so I had myself helped down here to be near the door.'

'All alone, on Easter Day? Oh! how horrid of that servant to take her holiday,' Margery exclaimed.

'No doubt she thought it horrid of me to take such an inconvenient time to tumble down and lame myself. People are so thoughtless. They never take convenient opportunities to be ill and die in. So my doctor says. They find a perverse pleasure in dying and being born at dead of night, when they had much better be asleep. They will have influenza and pneumonia in the worst weather, especially when they live far from doctors. They insist upon taking fevers and diphtherias, whole towns at once, instead of waiting till people have leisure to attend to

them. Altogether one has no patience with humanity in the mass.'

'And your fire so low! Mayn't I mend it for you?' In a moment the delicate gloves were off and the slender figure in modish raiment was busy with poker, coal and wood, till the dull ashen fire blazed merrily. Then the willing hands went to work with a hearth-broom till all was neat and clean.

'But how will you get your luncheon?' she asked, springing from the hearth-rug and looking round the room, noting the polished oaken settle, the heavy table adorned with a bowl of primroses reflected on its dark surface, the black-beamed ceiling, the low lattice window of many lights with its cushioned seat. She was told that biscuits and cold tea within reach of the sofa would suffice.

'And what shall I call you?' Miss Dorrien asked, receiving the girlish answer,

'Call me Margery'; with the addition, 'I am staying with my aunts, Mrs. Wynne and Miss Ormsby, at Cliffe Grange. It will be rather a long stay, as my father is on foreign service.'

'And your mother?'

'I lost her many years ago. It made me so sad not to miss her more. I scarcely knew her; she was so much abroad. After her death, I saw much more of my father, because he came home just then, and I was growing older every day. Really, I might almost say I had no mother. I was a little afraid of my father when first he came home. I knew so little of him and thought him stern and cold. I had been too much with women to understand men.'

'I was never afraid of my father, Margery. He spoilt me. I was more fond of him than even of my dear mother.'

'Have you nobody left, dear Miss Dorrien?' her young guest asked; 'it must be so terribly sad to live alone like this.'

'Not quite alone; I live with memories,' she replied, her eyes luminous and moist. 'Distant cousins are all that remain of my blood. I have a very dear old friend, once my mother's maid. She is bed-ridden; she lives at the *Bugle* opposite.'

There was a sound in the mellow voice, Margery thought, as of some mournful music burdening the words; it went to the girl's heart; she was at the age when suffering is most intolerable and emotions are most exacting.

'I can't bear to think of it,' she cried. 'Did you always live here? Were you long alone with your mother?'

Then she heard that many things intolerable to youth are

softened, even palatable, to maturity, that nothing is unbearable, after shame and conscious sin, except idleness. She heard of the companionship of books, fellowship of nature, of the beauty and pleasantness of simple lives and wholesome tastes, that nothing really matters except having 'God to friend.' That all sorrow and sighing will soon flee away for ever, all dark mysteries culminate in beauty, all dissonance modulate to harmony. The large dark eyes deepened and filled with thought, the rich voice rose and fell in musical cadence, always burdened with that mournful refrain. Margery knew herself forgotten in the soliloquy to which solitary people are prone; unversed though she was in suffering, she felt that this lonely woman, still so beautiful and of so commanding and intellectual a countenance, had been through deep waters of pain. Her eyes clouded, her tender young mouth quivered.

'My dear child,' she heard in caressing tones, 'what an ill return I am making for your kindness. What cloudy talk for a young creature made for sunshine. I don't deserve such a visitor, grim recluse that I am. Oh! I was gay enough at your age, Margery. No, people need not grow sad with years. But mine has been a sad life, and I am a moping owl complaining to the moon. You are the moon.'

Margery was now charmed by rich notes of pleasure in the voice; she was vaguely conscious that here was a many-sided nature and unusual capacity for enjoyment, all of which made her heart warm to this deep and noble soul, and found faint expression in words.

Presently it was suggested that her friends would be missing her. But Margery lingered and lingered, went to the door and returned with an impetuous, 'Do let me stay and take care of you. Easter is a feast. It is not right to dine on biscuits. If your servant does not return till ten o'clock you will have nothing else. Mayn't I go and forage in your larder?'

The lady laughed silently and sweetly; Margery penetrated to the kitchen, whence she soon returned radiant, with all things to set a table; then vanished a second time and re-appeared with cold meat, butter, a fruit-tart, and cold potatoes, arranging all with a silent celerity that greatly edified the mistress of the Old House, who perceived that the table was laid for two.

'Now, how would you like these potatoes done? Shall it be mashed and steamed, a sort of hotch-potch with meat, or shall there be grilled meat separate?' Margery asked.

'These things are beyond me: I leave them to a past mistress

of cookery,' she heard; so, adjusting an apron over her smart Sunday frock and tucking up her sleeves, she went to work with exultation, and soon had a couple of hot dishes on the table.

'Excuse cooking in the dining-room; the kitchen fire was out; it's more sociable here. Isn't it delightful? It's just like the stories my father tells of foraging and cooking in the Crimea as a subaltern—only much nicer. Let me give you some more? So kind of you to say you like it. Perhaps it's better than dry biscuit. No, my aunts won't send the crier after me. They'll think I am lunching at the Rectory. You didn't expect anybody to luncheon to-day, did you?' So she chatted, always enfolded in long loving glances, always waking dim memories and sending curious thrills through Grace's heart by looks and words, strangely familiar yet so new.

'Dear child, you remind me of I can't tell what or whom,' she said presently, 'but of something that seems to have made me very happy, long ago.'

'Perhaps we were friends in another world, in another stage of existence. My father believes in Platonism, in souls created in pairs and pre-destined to each other for eternity. If in pairs, why not in family groups?'

'Do you read Italian, Margery? Dante? *Vita Nuova*?'

'A little. *Vita Nuova* is rather dim to me. My father took me through it last year. I got on better with the *Divina Commedia*.'

Grace became silent, with a look that Margery could not read, rapt yet sad, sweet, far-off, wistful; her dark magnetic eyes had something in their liquid depths that filled her young guest with awe. Suddenly Margery remembered the talk in the parish room the night before, and smiled. It was droll to think of plump Mrs. Besson and prim Miss Hanleys pitying and patronising this stately and beautiful woman with tragedy marked on her face and music in her voice.

'What became of you after morning service, Margery?' her aunt asked, when she appeared in the Grange drawing-room at tea.

'I went to the Old House to inquire for Miss Dorrien, Auntie. She was hurt by that horrid scorcher on Friday. She was on a sofa, unable to move, and quite alone in that empty house, so I thought I might stay with her and cheer her up.'

'Poor thing: yes, it was very well. No doubt it was a change for her. Perhaps, after all, she would like the Miss Hanleys to call on her. But don't stay to luncheon with strangers again, my

dear. I am surprised that she asked you on that short acquaintance. No doubt she has lost all social knowledge, if she ever possessed it, poor thing.'

'She didn't ask me, auntie,' Margery returned, reddening and receiving a proper scolding.

CHAPTER VII

THE Hollies was an ugly, bare, new villa, having in front a formal grass-plot, garnished with a puzzle-monkey and pierced by round flowerbeds. This grass was surrounded by a border, newly planted with laburnum and lilac, euonymus and laurel. There was no sign of holly on or near the premises, a circumstance that accounted for its name.

Yet Mrs. Besson lived and was quite happy in the glaring white villa; she lived much on hope. Firstly, she hoped the puzzle-monkey would die; secondly, she hoped the trees and evergreens would grow; thirdly, she hoped that the scented clematis and Virginia creeper she had planted would soon clothe the stucco bareness of the Hollies. She was not without other sources of happiness, a capacity for it to begin with, good temper and a kind heart to go on with. She possessed a lovely and affectionate cat, a husband, a daughter, and a parrot, in all of whom she delighted, and all of whom gave her nothing but satisfaction—except the parrot, who sometimes swore, especially when the rector or the Miss Hanleys called, and who was always being banished from the garden on summer Sundays, because his language disturbed the devout meditations of a dissenting family in the next garden. Captain Besson, formerly a paymaster in the navy, who had brought the bird from its native woods, was more tolerant of the nautical expressions it had learnt on the voyage. As for Mossy, the only child of their late marriage, she revelled in the parrot's indiscretions.

'If we start at once,' Mrs. Besson, sitting bonneted and gloved by an open window at the Hollies, was saying to the Miss Hanleys, 'we shall arrive punctually at four. Allowing ten minutes for conversation and five for being shown in and out, we shall be back to tea; which, Mossy, my dear, have ready, all but just making the tea, hot scones and all.'

'But why mayn't Mossy go too?' her father asked. He was standing outside the window in shirt-sleeves, hoeing the flowerbeds.

'The party would be too formidable, Captain Besson,' Miss Beauty replied solemnly. 'As it is, I scarcely think Barbara ought to accompany us. Two is quite a visitation for a person unused to society.'

'Why not leave the missus out then?'

'Really, Captain Besson, a married lady is, on such an occasion—a—a—much-needed support,' returned Miss Hanley, mingling dignity with rebuke.

'Lord-a-mercy, what queer creatures women are! To think that one old maid can't go and call on another without two more to look after her. What the deuce are you pinching me for, Maria? So Captain Besson reflected aloud, as he held the gate open for the storming party to pass through on their way to the assault upon the Old House. 'Why, what 's up, Mossy, my dear? Eh? Called 'em old maids, did I? Why not? They 're past five-and-thirty, if they 're a day.'

'Oh, papa; we must really try to teach you manners. I wish they had let me go with them, though. Nobody has ever been inside the Old House yet, except the Heathcotes and Mrs. Cartmel. Some people say the cellars are full of buried treasure, old gold and silver cups piled with gold coins hidden away in the wars There are subterranean passages, sliding panels, and secret chambers. They all die sudden deaths. This Miss Dorrien is a miser, and very poor. There are ghosts and voices and strange music there at night.'

'Who told you all this, Mossy?' her father asked, straightening his back from stooping over his hoe. 'And why do you want to die a sudden death? *You're* not an old maid—yet, my dear.'

'Most gracious,' was the unanimous verdict of the three ladies on their return from their daring adventure.

'Poor thing; I do think she was really grateful for the attention,' Miss Hanley commented. 'Her lips were trembling, part of the time. I saw that she was ready to cry. Thank you, Mossy, one really needs refreshment after such an exertion.'

'Are you sure she wasn't ready to laugh?' suggested Captain Besson. 'I 've seen a queer twinkle in her eye more than once.'

'You!' cried Mrs. Besson, turning quickly upon him. '*You* have seen twinkles in Miss Dorrien's eyes, Thomas? Why, what in the world have you to do with her eyes?'

'Don't be jealous, my dear; no occasion, really,' he replied meekly.

'His ideas are so coarse,' Miss Hanley remarked afterwards, 'I suppose it is having been in the navy. I have heard that our grandfather swore a good deal.'

'So she didn't eat you all up alive, eh? Did she ask what you meant by bothering up in a body to her house?'

'Will she come to the guild-meeting?' asked the practical Mossy. 'That's the point.'

'Miss Dorrien will come to the next guild-meeting,' Mrs. Besson replied impressively. 'She will then learn our methods and constitution, and be able to decide whether she will finally join us.'

'Quite at her ease,' observed Miss Barbara, 'not in the least put out at being discovered gardening and having to go in and wash her hands.'

'Perfectly,' corroborated Miss Hanley. 'One might suppose that she was in the habit of receiving visits from total strangers. A pleasant smile, pleasing manners; and most grateful to us for calling. I really think we may find her an acquisition to our circle, dear Mrs. Besson.'

'My dear, I'm sure of it. But what poverty! Everything so shabby and old. And her dress. To be sure she was gardening.'

'Well, I'm glad we did it,' observed Miss Hanley, with a sigh of satisfaction. 'I wonder if Cliffe Grange will call.'

'Fancy her selling her garden produce,' exclaimed Mrs. Besson.

'And telling us so quietly, and not being ashamed,' added Miss Barbara,—'that bespoke the true lady.'

'Nonsense, Barbara. Of course she's a lady, or we shouldn't have called. How can she help being a lady? They're connections of the Garennes of Newcourt Place. I don't quite like her eyes. They go all through one.'

'Right you are, Miss Barbara,' commented Captain Besson. 'Right through you they go as clean as a whistle. They measure you off by the yard and put a wholesale price upon you, too.'

The subject of these comments had been somewhat surprised by the invasion of her solitary castle, and was at that moment describing it to Mr. Cartmel, then paying one of his periodic visits.

'I've been patronised, Mr. Cartmel,' she was saying; 'Barling society has taken compassion on me and invited me to a sewing tea-party.'

'Well,' replied Mr. Cartmel, 'why don't you go? I've often said that a little change and amusement would do you good.'

'That's just what the good ladies said. That was their argument,' she returned with the same quiver of the mouth observed

by Miss Hanley. 'People get so rusty with living alone,' was Miss Beast's observation. Miss Beauty added that intellect needed the stimulus of society, and that useful occupation was an antidote to grief. Little Mrs. Besson I rather like. She tells me that she is much attached to Mrs. Cartmel, with whom she has long been intimate.'

'They 're as thick as thieves. You won't easily find a better-hearted pair. I'll back my old woman against anybody for pure goodness, Miss Dorrien.'

'And not be a loser, Mr. Cartmel. I shall meet Mrs. Cartmel at the sewing-party, I 'm told. So that I need not be shy, having a friend to protect me.'

Thus Miss Dorrien at last made her entrance to Barling society, at three o'clock precisely on a warm April afternoon, in the drawing-room at Roselands.

The guild was already met, work had been apportioned, and thimbles assumed. Miss Ormsby had presented her niece Margery. Mrs. Heathcote had brought a reluctant daughter, who had tossed with her sister for the privilege of staying away and lost. Silence reigned, save for the light click of needles, rustle of calico, and occasional whisper of 'Lend me your cotton, —your scissors.' Gladdie Heathcote's comely face was drawn into a heavy frown, her lips pouted, she felt that her lot was hard—whenever she met Margery's glance, she made a face and tried to telegraph swear-words; other solace she had none—except pinching Mossy Besson and making her explode in perpetual titters, which drew surprised and reproachful glances from her elders upon her.

Miss Hanley was thinking of things to say when the restraint of silence should be removed; Miss Barbara was wondering if a sufficient supply of cakes had been provided, the guild being so full; every face was grave or sad—except that of the unfortunate Mossy—but the most unhappy countenance in the room was that of the rector, Mr. Heathcote, who stood in the midst of the feminine circle, hemming and hesitating, with a book, a religious biography, open in his hand. He had found the place and was just beginning to read, when the door opened, and, to the intense surprise of all, except the Hanleys and Bessons, who were proudly reticent, a tall figure dressed in black entered the room, unannounced and unconcerned, and went up to Miss Hanley, who received her with warmth, informed her of the rule of silence and apportioned her a seat and a task, both of which she took, minutely observed by all.

Stitch, stitch from the ladies, rumble, grumble from the solitary and miserable man, who, it must be owned, sometimes lost his place and never liked it. The subject of the memoir was a morbid and introspective person, guiltless of any thought or emotion unconnected with straitly dogmatic personal religion. Yet religious feeling is silent and inexpressible even by genius. No wonder Mr. Heathcote's attention wandered; no wonder the younger ladies dropped thimbles and whispered explanations for diversion, and Miss Gladdie complained that she could not even think with 'that beastly row' in her ears—a circumstance, in the opinion of her sire, not to be deplored.

But eyes might, and often did, wander, especially the quick dark orbs of the new-comer, which recalled to Mossy Captain Besson's remark upon them. Yes; they measured every face there and valued it, probably at wholesale if not selling-off price, Mossy was sure.

When they met Margery's bright glance, they softened and deepened, and a smile was exchanged. Whenever Margery looked up from her sewing, she seemed to be enfolded in the lustre of that soft deep gaze, yet Mossy was always being caught in a yawn or a titter by the same, and Miss Barbara, conscious of an unusually fervid glow in the wrong part of her face, was sure it did not escape these quick eyes. Nor did it, nor the kind and gentle expression of the rest of the face, nor the anguish depicted on Mr. Heathcote's, nor the professional neutrality of Mrs. Heathcote's, nor the placid content on Mrs. Cartmel's and the dexterity with which her next neighbour continually rescued her on the verge of slumber by well-directed pinches, nor the utter vacuity on most of the faces bent diligently over the work. Yet Miss Dorrien's stitching never ceased, and was, Miss Hanley afterwards observed, beyond praise; yet she was always trying to account for the singular magnetism Margery's fresh young face had for her, and wondering at the chords of emotion and memory her every movement and look set vibrating within her. Margery had called twice since Easter Day, they had talked much, but little of personal things. The question of calling from the Grange had been mooted between them, with the decision that the Old House ought to call first. Margery's surname had not yet been pronounced; perhaps Miss Dorrien had assumed that it must be Ormsby or Wynne.

'Thank you, Mr. Heathcote; I fear you must be very tired,' came from Miss Hanley, and was faintly echoed by the whole assembly, when the unfortunate clergyman, at the sound of the

gilt clock striking five, closed his book with unconcealed satisfaction and moved into a less central position in the room.

'What a beautiful character,' observed Miss Hanley effusively of the subject of the memoir; 'how I wish we could all in some measure copy her!'

'Dear Miss Hanley,' cried Margery impulsively, 'I hope to goodness you won't. A nasty, self-conscious, morbid, selfish thing, without a grain of sense or an atom of good taste. And then put together by such an utter donkey and in such a prosy, silly way. What's the matter, Aunt Julia?'

Even Gladdie Heathcote was appalled; silence of horror reigned in the startled assembly after Miss Ormsby's first deprecating 'Margery, my dear Margery,' had arrested the flow of the young damsel's unsolicited eloquence, a silence soon broken by Miss Hanley's indignant—

'Why, she was a saint! Actually a saint, whose life was written on purpose for people to copy!'

'I must confess,' Mr. Heathcote admitted, 'that the memoir is dull, and remarkably uninteresting, especially to the young. But it was meant,' he added weakly, 'as Miss Hanley so justly observes, it was meant to be improving.'

'Does that exclude interest, Mr. Heathcote?' Miss Dorrien asked, in the hope of diverting attention from Margery. 'And do you really think we ought all to copy that tiresome old woman? Don't be shocked, dear Miss Hanley, I am sure you are worth ten of her. I'd much rather copy you. And so, I think, would Miss—ah!—Margery—'

'Miss Hilton,' explained the rector in his resonant man's voice, so noticeable among the feminine trebles, now set flowing with the accumulated energy of hours of silence. He turned as he spoke, to give his arm to Miss Hanley and lead her, according to the guild's custom, to the dining-room, whither the other ladies followed, by twos and threes, Miss Barbara closing the procession.

'Did I hear rightly, Margery?' Grace asked, when, going with the stream in Mrs. Besson's charge, she found herself standing in the dining-room by her young friend amid the rustle and confusion of sitting down to table; 'is it—Hilton?'

'Didn't you know? I thought I—dear Miss Dorrien, how strange! What a mannerless girl you will think me——' But Miss Dorrien, as a guest and stranger, had to take the place of honour on Miss Hanley's left, the rector being on her right, and, a vigorous rapping on the table by a hammer in Miss Hanley's

hand having produced a temporary lull in the buzz of voices, Mr. Heathcote coughed his well-known cough and said his equally well-known grace; but unfortunately it was the after instead of the before-meat grace—a circumstance unnoticed by the guest on Miss Hanley's left.

No doubt, the latter was thinking, that was the secret of Margery's charm; there must be some relationship, those looks and gestures now clearly betrayed their origin and their connection with her own youth. There was even that indefinable likeness, that inherited something, that is more subtle and more identifying than similarity of feature and colouring. Yes, she was like him, though the eyes were dark grey with violet shadows, instead of clear light blue, the hair light brown, instead of golden, and the face was a girl's instead of a man's. Thinking thus, she looked up to Margery, who was still standing on the other side of the table in a group of young girls, for whom seats could not yet be found, and caught the look that had charmed her on that lonely Easter Day; it was the look that had taken her youth captive by the Mediterranean thirty years ago. But *what* relationship? Her heart went cold with fear. Niece or cousin it might be; family likenesses are capricious, types and qualities, physical or mental, lie dormant for generations; and yet—

'Thank you, Miss Hanley,' rang out the gay young voice she had learned to love; 'we can stand and grow better, there is ample room—for both.'

A little gush of laughter went round at Gladys Heathcote's left-handed retort of—'Speak for yourself, Margery. I can't stir—not even my tea.'

No one noticed the grave, rapt face on Miss Hanley's left; Grace's heart leapt and sank and leapt again. No wonder the voice had touched her so strangely; yet the difference of sex, without the clue of name, was enough to waken wonder as to the reason of that moving, memory-kindling tone. Oh, surely not his child! Surely he had not married! Five years after the parting letter he had been single still; all those years she had been dreaming, thinking, praying of him, as single. The thought of his marriage was an atrocity. Marriage is such a changing, moulding thing; none can pass through it without vital development, almost organic change of character. Was the Mark Hilton of daily thought but a phantom of memory and imagination; had he no real existence, after all?

The courtesies of the long, crowded tea-table were exacting;

conversation, happily, was impossible in the perpetual handing of cups before the whole table was served. The heat and odour of so much tea and cake in the crowded room made the atmosphere thick and dizzy; the buzz of confused talk and laughter helped the overpowering sensation: Miss Barbara, at the foot of the table, shuddered to think what deep crimson might be glowing on the feature she felt so unpleasantly hot, and would have given the world for a peep in her pocket-glass; another window was thrown open; some one observed that Miss Dorrien was unwell; Mrs. Besson, her next neighbour, supplied her with smelling-salts. No; she was not unwell; perhaps a little overcome by the heat; the salts were reviving. What beautiful china on the board; it was surely antique. Miss Hanley was to be congratulated.

'Poor thing,' Miss Barbara whispered, 'unused to company, the confusion and excitement must be very trying at first.'

Places had now been made for the young girls between their elders. Margery was to share a chair with Gladys.

'It isn't so hard on me, Gladdie, I can creep in anywhere, being but a little one,' she was saying, 'but you are tall and uncomfortable.'

'It is well to be little in one's own estimation, my dear,' Mrs. Heathcote kindly observed, unheeding her daughter's muttered comment of 'Beastly shop!'

'And great in reality,' Miss Hanley finished graciously. 'I was not aware till this afternoon that we had the honour of entertaining the daughter of one of our most distinguished men, Miss Hilton.'

Margery crimsoned, but looked pleased.

'Very kind of you to say so, Miss Hanley,' she replied bashfully.

'We needn't ask where Lord Hilton is,' Mr. Heathcote added with a kind smile. 'All Englishmen are thankful to know in whose hands the defence of our frontier is at present. Capital news to-day, Miss Hanley, eh? Are you following the frontier operations with interest, Miss Dorrien?'

'With deepest interest—who would not?' was the soft-toned rejoinder, that roused an indefinable emotion in Mr. Heathcote.

'Something curiously attractive in Miss Dorrien,' he remarked later to his wife; 'her voice affects me like—like wind in summer-trees—like——'

'Barrel-organs? Cheap champagne?' was the sub-acid sug-

gestion. 'I do wish you could remember whether it is before or after meat when you say grace, Augustus.'

'You can't wish it more fervently than I, my dear,' was the melancholy rejoinder.

Those ladies who dined early remained later at the sewing, the Cliffe Grange and Rectory people, not being among these, left soon after tea; Miss Dorrien soon followed, and climbed the hill by the footpath alone, with a promise to attend the next guild-meeting

'It has been such a pleasant afternoon, Miss Hanley,' she said when leaving, with a smile that conquered both sisters.

'I am sure you will be happier, my dear,' Mrs. Besson added, 'if you go out in this quiet way among your neighbours. Now don't you feel that it has done you good already?'

'Certainly I do,' she acknowledged with a pensive smile, turning away homewards full of the hurt she had received from this unexpected quarter. It was wholesome to enter personally into the village life, and take an active part, however humble, with others. After tea there had been a stroll round the grass-plot at Roselands, the grass-plot being about the size of an average dining-table, yet during this stroll Miss Barbara's thorn in the flesh had been avowed and had met with sympathy and promise of practical aid.

Though Grace went homewards, she did not immediately go home, but went into the *Bugle*, and finding that Mrs. Barnes was alone, lying so that she could see from her window the garden of the Old House across the road, ran upstairs to her.

'Oh, Mursie,' she cried in the old impetuous way, 'he is married, married. Years and years ago. And my child, my Margery, my pretty pearl, is his daughter, his own daughter.'

'Eh! dearie, did ye no ken before?' asked Mursell wonderingly. 'What for de ye cry, missie dear? Would ye have the lad be lonely his life-long for love of your bright een? And him a great lord and a grand soldier. Never did ye name his name, dearie, but well I kenned where the bairnie's heart went. Dinna greet. And the yoong lassie come to cheer ye too. It's glad and thankful ye should be, Miss Greece.'

'So I am, Mursie,' came through thick sobs, 'most thankful. But why is life so torturing? Why is love so cruel? The child is only here on a visit. The claim I might have had upon her I can never have now. The father will be a bar between—Mursie dear, I tried to do my duty.'

'Ay, dearie, and ye did it. It will nc be forgotten at the

Great Day. The poor, poor mistress! It was sore trouble she had. Ay, and it's great tribulation you have come out of. Can ye no read me my portion the night, Missie? Maybe it will quieten ye down.'

The sun was set, a glorious afterglow was growing from brightness to brightness over half the heavens when the Book was closed, the Good-night said, and the reader went to her lonely hearth with peace in her heart, sorrow and peace, joy and peace. A star, with liquid gaze, looked lovingly down upon her and spoke to her out of the past—the happy, sweet young past, the past that had promised and surmised no such loneliness as this. Strange that all should be gone, even little Laurie in her young youth, and she alone be left to wake in the dead night and wonder and ask—where are they all? to wake in the stagnant morning, and wonder and ask again—where are they all? But her hearth was not so lonely that night, after all. For there, pacing up and down in the dews before the open hall-door, and absorbed in watching the beautiful afterglow and gradual stealing on of stars over the sky, was Bertram.

'What is to become of me if you take to gadding about?' he asked with tender reproach. 'Here I've been waiting and hoping and waiting——'

'And idling, you wicked boy. I daresay, indeed. And the poor patients knocking at the door, and wondering when you will come back. Oh, Maurice, what *should* I do without you, dear?'

The young man's heart leapt up in his breast. With a sudden impulse, that surprised even himself, he took the lonely woman in his arms and kissed her.

'You are too good, too sweet, to let me love you,' he cried wildly. 'Oh, my beloved, my adored!'

'Hush! oh, hush!' she murmured, trembling, shuddering, stirred to the depths, overmastered by wild, half-realised emotion, and extricating herself from the clinging embrace. It was a critical moment; so much, with terror and tumultuous joy, she was able to know. In the utter loneliness, the sudden loss even of the right to *remember*, she was tempted. One word, one look, one faint concession to human weakness, and this young life, with its pure and passionate devotion, was hers for ever. The fair head was so like one seen and loved—seen long ago, loved—till now; such passion, so sudden and over-mastering, so impetuously expressed, can never fail to kindle responsive emotion; she was weak with a woman's most perilous weakness,

the imperious need of loving and being loved, and they were both so utterly alone, so unfettered by any one other tie. Yes; she might take it, accept the treasure of which he was scarcely conscious, absorb his youth, be earthly happy: did not many a man ask, woo and accept, the maiden love of many a woman—nay, of many a child—less than half his age?

Maurice stood there, tall and beautiful in the dewy afterglow of the magic spring night, his eyes aflame, his words burning, his arms opened. He was pleading that she was *not* twice his age; that he was no boy, but a mature man, able to know his will; that he had worshipped her, and her only, from childhood; that he had never before kissed mortal woman; that he could not, and would not, live without her; that his every happy and noble memory and thought had circled round her, ever since he could remember, ever since she once raised him—a wounded, suffering child—in her arms, and healed him; that she was not like others—years were nothing to her, that she was divinely, immortally beautiful; that she was gifted, good, and charming beyond mortal woman, and that he adored her—the eternal lover's plea that, after all, covers all.

So he raved in the scented garden, while a young moon rose and steeped the world in silver glamour and a nightingale thrilled all the air with the golden passion of his song, and Grace Dorrien, weak and trembling from a life of repressed emotion, untasted happiness, and stifled vitality, with a heart aching from bereavement, solitude, and loneliness, and newly bruised from that last fresh-heard desertion, tried to conquer this unexpected revolt of self and do her duty. She might accept this unimaginable treasure, she might make him happy, love him, guide him, bless him, bear with him, as no young wife could. He was twenty-eight; she had been that age twenty-three years ago. She was his first love; she had loved since before he was born. She had asked nothing, dreamed nothing. This wooing was so unexpected; only to love and be loved, to sink into those eager arms, to rest on that adoring breast, to bless and be blest, ah, how easy, ah, how sweet! To take that virgin, half-wakened passion, that stainless youth, that vigour of hope and promise, and shelter the lifelong ache of yearning, 'the constant anguish of patience' in its warmth and beauty! He would be true; she knew him well; but in three, four, five years, the last faded remnant of her beauty would have vanished entirely, the prime of his manhood, the fulness of his passion scarcely have culminated; the young

romance would be gone, the glamour faded. She would be to him an ageing woman without charm, without attraction; but he would be true. His love would have faded to a calm household affection, mixed with pity, salted with forbearance; he would be true, but ah! not happy. And he would be tempted. She might live long; if she died at seventy, he would still be under fifty.

Apage, Satana! She must not take advantage of this generous young passion, not snatch selfishly at this golden treasure, not absorb this young life in her own outworn one. But she could not speak; she could not calm the wild throbbing of her pulses; she feared her own weakness.

It was but a little while, after all; the difficult moment, during which this mad tumult of emotion and thought throbbed and whirled, passed before the shadow cast by the Old House upon the turf had perceptibly moved. She found a voice and words at last.

'Do not make yourself ridiculous, Maurice,' she said in sharp, cold tones. 'If you cannot conquer this folly, you had better go away till you can. Of course, if you behave like this again, we must part.'

'This to me? Oh, darling!'

'Nonsense! You don't know what you are talking about. The moon and the nightingale and the spring weather have gone to your head. You are most impertinent. Your behaviour is disrespectful and irreverent. You have presumed upon my friendship. I have treated you too much like a child. Oh, I was to blame, to blame.' Tears sprang to her eyes; she felt the golden cross worn beneath her dress. Why had she allowed this to come to pass? but how could she have foreboded such a turn in this secure friendship? Fatal security, answerable for so much disaster.

But however roused, this sudden storm of passion could not so easily be stilled. In this magic of soft lights and shadows, the traces of time were invisible upon the beautiful face and imperial figure, while voice and gesture, thrilling with emotion, acquired fresh charm and distinction. Bertram thought, or rather felt, that this was the most beautiful woman in the whole world. His words grew wilder.

'Go,' she said at last, pointing to the door through the house, 'and never return. Oh, it is hard to lose *all* friends.'

He turned dead white; he was subdued at last.

'No, no,' he pleaded; 'I will ask nothing. But let me, let me be your friend, your servant.'

'Go.'

He turned slowly and sadly away, paused, and looked back again.

'Forgive?' he asked humbly.

'Some day, perhaps, when you are sane.' Then he went.

CHAPTER VIII

In the dewy brightness of morning, in the joyous tumult of singing, soaring larks and happy chorus of April song-birds, the sudden enchantment of the previous night seemed incredible, like some wild dream. Grace rose early and pursued her homely occupations as usual, but with a heavy heart, thinking how a moment's madness had nearly overthrown a life's ideal and two lives' happiness; and how unexpected these crises and the moments of weakness in which they occur always are. He, too, was perhaps sobered by the morning. She was probably to blame; probably, nay certainly, had used too much tenderness; she had never realised that the curly-headed, motherless boy she always saw and pitied in Bertram was now a grown man. He would take no hurt from last night's rehearsal; for him the curtain would soon rise upon the actual drama; but she might lose her friend—after that momentary swerve the friendship could never again be the same. The other darling was lost, too; Margery, the child of some strange woman loved by Mark. But the woman was dead; after all, a love so ethereal as hers must not perish, in spite of the eternal bar of marriage between. All those years she had thought of him as 'my Mark'; never again now.

Evening brought a long, penitent letter from Bertram. He had been presumptuous, impertinent; his feelings had carried him away. He had loved her so long, had worshipped her so truly in childish dreams. There was once a boy, homeless, motherless—loveless but for her—who used to pace the cloisters of Christ's Hospital with a breaking heart and salve the pain by dreams of the Old House and the dear ladies who had befriended his helpless childhood; the Old House was the only house in which he had not been made to feel himself an intruder, the only home he had ever had. He could never be happy except with her. Would she forgive him; might he come again? Would she remember that blue-coated boy and his dreams? Even if he had mistaken the nature of his feeling for her, its strength was

undoubted. He wanted to take care of her and free her from a life so laborious and so unfit for one so gifted, so sweet, so dear. Marriage was a union of congenial hearts; theirs could not fail to be happy.

To this came the reply:—

'DEAR MAURICE,—Don't talk nonsense. I don't want to be worshipped, and I won't have it. As for the folly of the night before last, it was too outrageous to last for more than five minutes. Having taken care of myself these fifty years, I may continue to do so, I should think. If, in a week or ten days' time, you think you can behave like a sensible man, you may call, not otherwise. I want to know how to cure a red nose.—Your sincere friend, G. H. DORRIEN.'

'Dear Miss Beast,' she reflected, as she laid down her pen, 'you should rejoice in that poor little affliction. It will about finish that absurd young donkey, I hope.'

The afternoon was well advanced; this letter, with the rest of the day's correspondence, had been laid in the open window for the letter-carrier to take as he passed, when Margery came smiling down the street and stopped.

'Are you at home, dear Miss Dorrien?' she asked; 'I was coming to call. May I?'

Of course she was welcome, and, of course, she came in and was received as usual; yet scarcely as usual. Margery felt a shadow, an inexplicable chill; she was repressed, almost frightened. After all, the friendship was new; it had been pitched too high at the beginning; this coolness was the natural result. Stupid not to have given her name, perhaps Miss Dorrien was vexed. The child of such a distinguished man as Lord Hilton was used to be made much of, and could not conceive of herself as an unknown, inconspicuous person.

They fell back upon banality; the afternoon was chill with cutting east wind, bright sunshine was welcome as well as a bright fire in the withdrawing room. Mrs. Wynne and Miss Ormsby had been greatly disappointed at not being at home when Miss Dorrien called on the preceding day. The conversation had risen no higher, when Margery, finding nothing more to say, rose with visible reluctance to go. But Grace simply motioned her back to her seat with—

'Don't go yet; you've but just come,' yet remained abstracted and preoccupied as before. 'And so—you didn't get on with *Vita Nuova*?' she asked presently.

'Not much. My father said it was because I had no soul. He calls me an Undine. That is hopeful; because I may get one—if ever I contrive to fall in love. I love Undine's story. I wonder if there are many women who never love, Miss Dorrien. I don't think *they* are the old maids, do you?'

'Do you think Miss Hanleys are still waiting for souls?'

'Oh, no! I believe all the old maids in Barling have histories.'

A singular expression came into the deep eyes gazing into Margery's; there was silence for some seconds. Then Grace began—

'Margery, did you ever hear anything about *me* before you came to Barling? Tell me without reserve.'

'There is nothing to tell. I never heard a word. But, of course, you have a history. Being so very beautiful and charming even now, what *must* you have been as a girl?'

She sighed. 'He never spoke of me, perhaps never remembered me,' she thought, looking at his child with the deep, penetrating gaze that sometimes became disquieting.

'You have become dear to me, Margery,' she said at last; 'that is why I called at the Grange. Are you sure that your aunts like you to come here? Do you think—your father—would like it?'

'I am sure of it, Miss Dorrien; and my aunts, before I knew you, were wishing to make your acquaintance. I wrote to papa last night. He likes me to know intellectual people. He is rather romantic, you know.'

'Really? One hears only of his—achievements. The private life of great men is—so—interesting. You are like him.'

'Photographs and prints are so deceiving. But you may have seen Millais's portrait at the Academy? No? I am not thought like him—Mark is. *I* take after my mother. The marriage was most romantic——'

'Ah!'

'What is the matter, dear Miss Dorrien?'

'Nothing. Was it thought to be a love-match?'

'No. My mother spoke of it the last time I saw her, and the aunts knew. My mother was once engaged to an engineer officer in India, a great friend of my father's, and he was killed shortly before the wedding-day in a small frontier skirmish. She was devoted to him, and quite broken-hearted by her loss. My father, who was also much grieved for his friend's death, then became very intimate with her; they used to talk of him a great deal. Presently my grandfather died, and my mother was left

alone in India—Aunt Julia always lived in England with the married aunt, Mrs. Wynne. Then my father asked her to marry him. She said that she could not care for him enough, her heart was in that grave. So he told her his own story. He was once much attached to a very beautiful and clever girl: she was a flirt, but he thought she had a heart. They used to correspond. I think he still keeps her letters. They were young, and he was not in a position to marry, so there was no formal engagement, but it was an understood thing; he had spoken to her people. After a year or two, when it came to the point, she threw him over——'

'Threw him over? Oh, Margery!'

'Wasn't it a shame? She said she had thought he meant her sister. The sister was an invalid, and my father had naturally been very attentive to her. My mother thought it all humbug about the sister, invented by this wretched girl. But whether or no, my father never got over it. He told my mother all—he said that they were both alone in the world, and both calculated to make each other fairly happy, and that it is much better to be married than single—he is always telling us children that—why should they not console one another with a quiet friendship? And so they did. They were very happy, but they were never in love. It was a friendship marriage.'

Miss Dorrien had risen and gone to the window during this recital, so that her face was invisible to her guest.

'I am boring you with all this?' the latter asked, timidly.

There was no response for a few seconds; then, without turning, Miss Dorrien said—

'Don't think me rude, dear. I am deeply interested in your story; but I was afraid some fowls had got into the seed-plots in the garden.' Yet Margery knew that it was past the time for respectable fowls to be at roost. 'And this girl,' Miss Dorrien added, 'the wretched girl who threw him over, what became of her?'

'I don't know; he never said. I think she married long and long ago. But he never forgot her. After he came home and I lived with him, he got into the way of talking things over of an evening when we were alone, almost as if I were not present, and he used often to allude to this Grace—that was her name. I think she must be dead now. I think she must have died last year. At all events, he heard something about her then that upset him dreadfully. I daresay you may have seen that a sword of honour with the freedom of the city was presented to

him last autumn. He heard or saw this on that day. He could hardly rouse himself to go to the banquet that evening. I was fastening on his medals and decorations, and asked what was the matter, thinking he must be unwell. He said he had been upset by hearing something about some one he knew long before I was born or thought of. Then when we were on the way to the banquet—there were no ladies present, but some of us looked on from a gallery; I wonder why only men are supposed to want food in public?—he was very silent, and just before the carriage stopped, while the crowd were cheering him, he told me that a great love was a great pain, but that he would rather not have lived than not have loved. Then he added that, if anything could make him doubt the immortality of the soul, the knowledge of a love like Dante's for Beatrice would end the doubt. So then I was sure that he was thinking of that faithless girl, and that she was probably just dead. My father would never give you the idea of a man of strong feeling. He only lets things out indirectly now and then. People think him reserved. The boys are afraid of him. So was I till I lived with him, and he began to make a companion of me. Yet he has a way of making people, especially men who serve under him, absolutely devoted to him. And he can be most entertaining and amusing. In society—he is not fond of society, but he had to take me about, and, of course, we had to receive —he is much appreciated. My sister, who married very young, still thinks him a little grim. She is in India. Father is not a good correspondent; he only sends us what we call despatches.'

'He has an affectionate daughter, Margery. But would he like this—ah!—old romance spoken of, and to strangers?'

'Oh, not to every one. But you are so sympathetic, and we are quite alone, and I do love you so, dear Miss Dorrien. And you seem to be really interested in my father's life, both public and private. You can appreciate him.'

'Yes, I am interested. Is he much changed?'

She had been growing paler and paler; she spoke with a preoccupied air that checked the current of these girlish confidences. The young face, haloed with fair hair, that had lived so long in memory, was little in harmony with this filial portrait of the stern military commander, 'a little grim,' and apparently reserved even to his children, who sometimes showed a warmer and deeper side to the favourite daughter companion, for whom he evidently had more tenderness than people thought him capable of. The great captain and born leader of men loomed large and stern in

his child's description, eclipsing and erasing the young lover, who read the *Vita Nuova* by the Mediterranean, in a voice that still rang through thirty years of silence, with never forgotten thrills of pure passion. Heart-sickness and a pang like home-sickness came over Grace and made her shudder with undefined fear. Only the early dead retain their youth; the living die daily; the longer we live the more we die. She knew that she might search the wide world in vain for the young, loved face of him who had loved her. Yet this face, lost to all but her, had not quite faded; the eyes still shone in unforgotten beauty and tenderness, the firm, slender figure, the voice, the spiritual atmosphere—now surely changed—remained in her heart embalmed for ever. Stern and reserved was he? How different from the eager, warm-hearted man in the moon-lit garden, whose fair hair and blue eyes had suggested other and more spiritual analogies, and whose sudden passion had touched her so keenly but two days since. No one would think Bertram reserved or stern.

'Changed?' Margery echoed in surprise, after a pause. 'Since when?'

'Perhaps I meant much aged,' she corrected, flushing. 'Some people age so quickly. Is he grey, for instance?'

'His hair is grey, so is his moustache. But he is young in figure. Straight and slim and well-made, and very active and strong. He looks splendid in full-dress uniform, especially on his charger, Emperor. There was an equestrian portrait of him in last year's Academy. I must go now. Good-night, darling. It is so sweet of you to let me love you.'

'I thank you for your warm affection, dear Margery. And I thank you for something else that you have given me back to-night. No, I can't tell you what, and you must not ask. Good-night, good-night.'

She was glad to be alone, glad to have the shadows and echoing silences of the empty house to herself to muse and to weep in. Yet he had never forgotten her, and yet he spoke of her to his nearest and dearest in moments of sacred confidence. He would rather not have lived than not have loved; and he had felt her great sorrow, and been pre-occupied with it in the hour of his greatest triumph. Those holy and sweet memories, of which the knowledge of Margery's parentage had seemed to rob her, were given back; she might summon them to her lonely musings again and again. She might become used to this fresh picture of the great soldier, grey-haired, but agile and slender,

looking 'splendid' upon his charger; grave, reticent, yet with great reserves of tenderness, and true to the golden ideals of youth. Would he tell Margery? No, he would have told her already had he intended it. He knew that she was within reach of the Old House.

'He never knew that I loved him,' she thought, and the words echoed through her brain, and made themselves into the burden of a long love-poem.

Bertram obeyed the injunction not to call, till full ten days had expired, when he was almost as much relieved as surprised to be told that Miss Dorrien was unable to see him that evening, but hoped he would call again soon. Yet he pitied himself deeply, and thought himself the most hardly used of men.

And when, some days later, he was admitted, he could scarcely speak; the memory of the garden scene was too recent and too agitating.

It was the anniversary of his first visit since childhood to the Old House. Grace remembered it well, and her mother's first words to him: 'Mark Hilton come at last, at last!' Nor had he forgotten, though the name then given him had slipped his memory; all else was vivid, clear, and very sweet. The beloved room was all glorious as then with sunset, the beloved face was radiant with it; but the beloved hand, then warm and welcoming, and kissed almost without thought, was now cold, tremulous, and quickly withdrawn; nor did he dare raise it to his lips.

'I was sorry not to be able to see you the other day,' he heard in a cold yet thrilling voice; 'I was much engaged with business letters and documents; I'd been at it all day and was quite worn out.'

'I was dreadfully disappointed,' he replied, looking very pathetic, and remembering that she had never before since Mrs. Dorrien's death been too busy or tired to see him. Evidently he was not, probably never would be, quite forgiven.

'You have often been past the Old House lately,' was the next attempt at conversation; 'who is the patient?'

'There was no patient,' was the embarrassed confession. 'But—ah—horses must be exercised; and it is wiser to be seen in as many different directions as possible.'

'No doubt,' she replied, thinking this an odd way of accounting for a daily drive in one direction. 'I 'm afraid St. Ann's is as healthy as ever then. What a place it would be for a convalescent home.'

'Wouldn't it,' he assented, brightening. 'That is a favourite

dream of mine. How I wish I could get hold of some rascally old millionaire, and make him stand and deliver. I know the very spot where I would build my home.'

'I happen to know a millionaire; and, oddly enough, the rascally old person *I* happen to know happens to want to build a convalescent home. I could put you into communication with this bloated wretch's man of business, if you liked. The miserable reptile would readily finance the scheme, if you submitted practical working plans and prospectuses to his solicitors, I fancy.'

'Oh! Miss Dorrien, is it possible? How very sweet of you!'

'How sweet of the rascally old millionaire, you mean. After all, these despised capitalists come in handy at times. This person's solicitor, a Mr. Humphrey Dolliver, the head of a well-known London firm, will be at Barling next week, when I will introduce you to him. But I think you had better write to him first, stating very clearly exactly what is wanted.'

'Can it be true? It seems too good. This house is always echoing with fairy tales.'

'But this is a reality, remember. And it must be thoroughly practical and well thought out, else, I fancy, this crusty, musty old scoundrel will decline to disgorge the needful money.'

'It shall be. Dear Miss Dorrien, how practical and business-like you are. I often wonder that, with all your imagination and poetry and bright wit, you combine so much plain common-sense and——'

'In short, what an excellent lawyer's clerk I should make? Don't be silly and don't flatter. Come now, let me hear what you have been doing. You ought to have young society, girl society——'

'I never cared for girls; I hate bread-and-butter misses,' was the contemptuous but blushing rejoinder.

'Which shows that Master Maurice Bertram is still in his hobbledehoyhood. Now don't give yourself airs. Try to be a sensible—ah—man. At twenty-eight it is time to be a man.'

'Why do you take such pleasure in wounding me, dear Miss Dorrien?' he faltered pathetically. 'You *know* what power you have.'

'Nonsense! I know that you want your ears well boxed,' was the sharp retort. 'Do you call Gladys and Mabel Heathcote bread-and-butter misses? Why don't you go oftener to the Rectory and make friends there?'

'I go often enough. But as for making friends! Miss Gladys called me a beastly idiot the other day.'

'It was more just than refined. You meet the Miss Hanleys there, and many other delightful women, since youth and crude manners find so little favour with you. And Miss Ormsby, who is some ten or fifteen years younger than I. Have you a card for the Grange dance? Yes? That's right. Mind you dance every dance. I suppose you *can* dance?'

'I can jump about. And, of course, if *you* wish it—' with a heart-broken accent.

'Four partners for you already. The unripe Heathcotes, the mature Hanleys. Be sure you ask Miss Barbara to dance. Some nice girls from Estridge, the Denver-Joneses, three of them, that makes seven partners, Miss Ormsby, eight. And come and tell me all about it. And be sure you lose your heart to some of them. You ought to marry. It's a necessity in your profession.

'Which do you recommend me to choose?'

'Why, I forgot the best of them all. A really good, simple-hearted, pretty girl, Mossy Besson.'

'*That* brat!'

'Come, come, come! Now, good-night. Found this Home. Go to this dance; make yourself useful there; and cultivate young lady society. Read as widely as you can; work when you work and play when you play. And try not to be a greater fool than you can help.'

'Good-night, dear Miss Dorrien. You have scarified and snubbed and flouted me till I tingle all over with pain. But only let me come, and use me as you will.'

The Cliffe Grange dance had been long talked of. Margery was joyously excited over it, and almost vexed that Miss Dorrien would not just 'look in' for an hour.

'I want you to see me in my war-paint,' she said, so a compromise was effected by an hour spent by Grace in helping at the trying-on of the ball-dress; when, to Margery's surprise, Miss Dorrien, after critically surveying and turning her about, took half-a-dozen pins, a pair of scissors and a needle, and in five minutes transformed the gown from a mere gown into what Gladdie Heathcote called a creation, and the more poetic Mabel, a dream.

Bertram called at the Old House on his way to the dance to ask for a flower, and spent such a long time there that he had to be turned out at last. When he entered the withdrawing-room in the May sunset, his blonde hair parted at the side, and taking the light where it was brushed up above his forehead like a bird's wing, Grace's heart gave a great bound; she turned white. She

had not seen him in evening-dress before, or perhaps observed how his height and fine make and the brilliance of his eyes were set off by the dead blacks and whites of his costume.

Thirty years rolled back; a long spent May sunset poured into a London drawing-room, a tall young man entered in evening-dress with such blonde hair and such a look in eyes as brilliant. He asked for a flower and received it. She pictured the grey-haired soldier, splendid upon his charger, in scarlet and gold, his breast covered with decorations, the coveted V.C. among them. He was but a picture, the young blonde man had been a seen reality; she had placed the flower in his coat with young trembling fingers. But it was long, long ago.

'That tie will slip with the first dance, Maurice,' she said, and in a minute, with two touches and a pin, the tie was made secure. Two more touches and the lily of the valley was firm in the coat.

'I will dance twice with Miss Beast for your sake,' he said, 'but mayn't I rehearse with you?'

'Why not? You'll find a broom in a closet on the landing outside. You can dance with that while I play and tell you your steps.'

'Thanks *awfully!* Well, I don't care. Whoever I dance with I'll shut my eyes and think it's you. So good-night,' was the defiant retort through the closing door.

CHAPTER IX

Two days after the dance, Margery went to the Old House to tell her friend 'all about it,' sure of sympathetic hearing. To tell how she had never enjoyed a dance so thoroughly before, how some of them had kept it up till long past sunrise, and ended with a good old-fashioned country dance out in the dewy May sunbeams, long after the labourers were afield; how everybody had come from everywhere, with no refusals and no postponements, the Sandyknowe, Culveredge and St. Ann's contingents, the county squadron, the fort gunners and the garrison infantry; how scandalously Mabel Heathcote had carried on with a subaltern; how well Gladys had looked and behaved (for her); how the aunts had not been too tired, and of the gallantry with which Aunt Julia had entered into the spirit and action of that last wild, daylight country dance; how nobody had gone to bed, and the little Barling set had picnicked on the downs instead and come home to an informal afternoon reception; how pleasant it had

been to see people walking quietly home in early morning in their ball-dresses; how good most of the men had been, dancing most of the dances.

Going in by a garden wicket, she found Chip busy with rake and hoe.

'Evenen miss,' he growled in answer to her accost. 'Ay, she's in-doors, I reckon, without she've stepped across to *Bugle*.'

So Margery tripped happily up the turf walk to the hall door, perceiving sounds of music as she approached; sounds so often heard from that upper window, sounds that were soon recognised as Gounod's arrangement of Bach's prelude played on the harp. To this, as she entered through the open door, the *Ave Maria* floated out in a man's voice, sighing through the sweet *sostenuto* melody, swelling on wings of soft, pleading passion to heights of ecstatic desire, dying to peace, rising again and again in daring insistence on the repeated 'Maria, Maria,' thence gliding smoothly down to levels of sweet rapture.

She stood listening in wonder. What man was invading and dominating the sanctuary of this sweet hermitage, that she thought her own? The song poured on, the rippling *obbligato* meant for violoncello, flowed down to stillness on subtly modulated harp chords; Margery paused, listening for more music, doubting if it were not better to turn back, yet loth to lose her promised hour of intimate converse.

Silence continued; neither man nor music was seen or heard for full fifteen minutes, at the end of which she went up the polished oak stairs, where even her light footfall was audible, and reached the landing. The withdrawing-room door was open, a long shaft of slant sunlight shot from the window straight through it; Margery appeared in the doorway in the full sunshine, her white-robed figure seeming incandescent in the radiance. The blinds were partly down, so that the room was full of deep shadow, pierced by level bars of light, wherein objects were confused and difficult to distinguish.

On the spider-legged sofa, that was more like a double chair, sat the mistress of the house, her hands lightly clasped in her lap, her eyes luminous and moist. Sideways on the same sofa was a tall man bending towards her, so that his head was on a level with hers, one arm over the back of the sofa behind her, the other hand laid upon hers; his face was earnest, his eyes brilliant, his voice low. One long sunbeam glowed through his fair hair, just touched the fair moustache in passing, flamed upon an antique, tall-stemmed cup of gold standing on a table,

and fluttered like visible music upon the gilded harp at the other end of the room. This man had been the singer, the expression now on his face was such as suited the Ave Maria, that curious mediæval adoration of the *ewig weibliche*, not only in the human, but perhaps even in the divine.

At sight or sound of the slender form, clad as it were in light, in the doorway, the young man sprang up with a crimsoning face, Miss Dorrien at the same time rose slowly and advanced to meet her young guest, whose face was unusually grave and reserved, whose heart beat with wild fierce pain, mixed with surprise that was almost resentment. She recalled a scene of the ball night, when Bertram had been her partner, and they had taken a few turns at the end of their waltz on a gravelled walk in the fragrant garden, silvery with beams of a young May moon.

'A delightful, old-fashioned garden, I wonder how many hundred years it took to make it,' the cavalier had said.

'The Grange is Jacobean,' replied the lady, 'that is all my aunts know of it. It is not a possession of our family, only let to them. But the pearl of old gardens is at the Old House. You should see that.'

'Yes? that has probably been garden ground since Roman times. Or part of it. I'm told that the Roman Villa on the downs was discovered from the Old House garden, which had a subterranean communication with it.'

'Oh yes; Miss Dorrien discovered it herself. She dropped a ring one day, while gardening, into loose-dug earth, and trying to recover it, dug deeper and deeper, as the ring sank, till she found it was sliding down the side of a small concrete vault, that turned out to be the roofed entrance to the passage lower down. How lonely Miss Dorrien must be. What a strange life to lead all alone in that remote, ruinous house.'

'Very lonely. Loneliness has a charm for some people, I suppose, Miss Hilton.'

'There is something rather grand in the idea of a *woman* living that simple, solitary life, self-contained and aloof from surrounding pettiness. I have the greatest admiration for Miss Dorrien, Dr. Bertram. Her face is full of intellect and heart. She must have been very beautiful.'

'Do you think so? Yet people say that ladies have no taste for female beauty. One often finds that women greatly admired by men are thought nothing of by their own sex, and *vice versâ*.'

'You mean that I have no taste, Dr. Bertram. What a nasty mean way of insinuating it!'

'No, no; you are too hard on me,' he replied eagerly; turn it the other way, that we stupid men can't always rise to your levels of enthusiasm. We only admire what we like. "Beauty lives by kindness," as the song says. So when she is kind, we say she is fair, and other ladies wonder.'

'Sophistry, Dr. Bertram, but quite commendable. Whatever you may say, I shall continue to maintain the beauty of Miss Dorrien against all. She, people say, is quite as kind as she is fair.'

'Do you hear that nightingale in the distance, Miss Hilton? Shall I call him?'

Then he had whistled; a bird had replied, and soon a whole choir of them had been roused to song. It had been very charming, but—he had appeared neither to admire nor know the lady in whose intimate presence she had just surprised him. And that lady had never spoken of him as a friend, though his name had turned up in chat of local interest. Yet all these things together scarcely seem enough to account for Margery's annoyance and pain. She felt herself an intruder; she hated herself for coming in, as she had been bidden, in that informal way. Miss Dorrien's usual calm appeared to her young friend to have deserted her, to-night there was a subdued agitation, almost embarrassment, in her manner.

'Such a charming surprise, dear Margery,' she said with the usual kind kiss and warm hand-pressure, 'I have been hearing all about the dance. You never come so late as this; I had given you up.'

'I came earlier, dear Miss Dorrien; but I waited, not to interrupt the song. How do you do, Dr. Bertram? What a lovely thing that *Ave Maria* is! The harp *obbligato* is very nice too.'

'Very kind of you to say so. Dr. Bertram would not have been so bold in his singing if he had known we had an audience, I fancy,' Miss Dorrien replied. 'You were going to bring your violin one day, Margery.'

The violin, it appeared, had arrived, and was even now upon the hall-table, whither Bertram descended to fetch it up, while Grace heard that the aunts were dining out, and Margery had seized the opportunity for an evening's chat.

'Then you must dine with me and we'll have some music afterwards,' Grace said. 'Not,' she added, 'that there is anything to dine upon. Still a dinner of herbs—I'd better go and tell Saunders to see what she can find for us. And, Maurice, just go

to the garden and pull a salad, will you, please? You can join us if you like.'

'Won't I?' was the glad response. So the three shared the dinner of herbs, which lacked neither the spice mentioned by Solomon, nor salt of wit and savour of mirth.

'But I can't honestly call cold lamb and gooseberry tart, herbs,' Bertram objected; 'can you, Miss Hilton?'

'Why not? it's herb o' grace, isn't it?'

'Of course; it's grace before meat, and after, and all the while.'

'A day of grace, in fact, Dr. Bertram, a graceful interlude.'

'I've been hearing all about the dance, Margery,' the subject of these pleasantries broke in. 'I've seen one well-filled programme. Might I see another? Thank you. I perceive no record of that country dance in either. Who was your partner?'

'My cousin, Captain Alford. Jem Heathcote had Ethel Parker, Dr. Bertram's cousin. Aunt Julia and Captain Besson came down the middle in gallant style together. And Mossy Besson?'

'She fell to my share,' Bertram observed without enthusiasm.

'Dear little Mossy, such a sweet, simple-hearted girl,' Miss Dorrien began. 'You *were* fortunate, Maurice.'

'With such a name!' added Margery acidly. 'Why Mossy?'

'It fits. It's soft and green and found everywhere,' observed Mossy's late partner.

'No, no, Maurice; soft and fresh and delicately beautiful, yielding yet enduring. Not brilliant, but refreshing to the eye; loving retirement, courting obscurity, yet with constant charity clothing and embellishing harsh, unlovely, and scarred things. Such is Mossy Besson.'

Bertram made a face over this.

'Lucky girl,' he grumbled, 'to be cracked up to that extent.'

'Lucky man who wins her,' she retorted. 'I am told, Margery, that dear Miss Beast refused to dance because one or two young girls were sitting out. Dr. Bertram was distinctly snubbed by her.'

'Quite true. But Dr. Bertram did his duty, and so did most of the gentlemen. I do think it so unkind of men to stand by, when they know they are in the minority, and see girls sitting out, longing to dance and feeling wretched.'

'That *is* magnanimous,' Bertram commented. 'For I'd wager anything such wretchedness never befell—any one in this room. Well, it was the most delightful dance I ever had. Nobody but Miss Beast refused me. I could have hugged her for it.'

'So could I,' added Margery severely.

They went up in the fading sunset to the withdrawing-room, and soon filled it with music and singing. Maurice's music was somewhat casual, having been picked up at odd intervals, chiefly by ear; the concertina was his best instrument, he played the violin a little, and was learning the guitar of his dear lady. His voice was above the average, but untrained. Margery's was exquisitely trained, but only a fresh mezzo of ordinary compass and quality; her violin was scientific. Grace on the harp and Bertram on his violin accompanied Margery's; then came guitar and harp, with Margery touching the harpsichord. But Gounod's serenade, '*Quand tu dors calme et pure*,' as a concertina solo, was admitted to be the piece of the evening, so well was the passionate tenderness of that caressing air brought out.

'I've a great mind to learn the concertina too,' Margery confided to her hostess as they sat together, watching the player, who stood near the harp, straight and tall, swaying with the music, raising and lowering, opening and closing his arms as the concertina needed, his face earnest and tender, his level gaze straight before him, glowing as with covered fires; 'it is so graceful.'

When her young friends had left, Grace sat in the window-seat, looking out into the moon-lit garden and over a piece of road, where she could see the two figures gliding in and out of the shadows that finally engulfed them. Her eyes deepened and softened; her heart stirred. She was thinking of Margery's explanation of her second initial G. inscribed upon a sheet of music.

'Margery Grace is my name, my sister's is Dora Grace. We are both named after the lady my father loved before he met my mother. I am proud to bear the same name as you, dear Miss Dorrien.'

When those young figures were lost in the soft gloom, she left the window, and, drawing the harp to her, played the thin but sweet melody of the old 'Guards' Waltz.'

Margery was still pondering on the scene in the sun-pierced drawing-room and Bertram's apparent domestication at the Old House—whither a message from a patient had even been conveyed to him from St. Ann's—on the way in which he had been ordered to pull salads, and on the silence of both Grace and Maurice as to their friendship.

'What a delicious evening it has been!' she said, as they were leaving the Old House. 'How strange that Miss Dorrien should

have lived so long out of the world. She is absolutely charming. She must have been lovely in her youth; and so clever, yet so sweet. Such a musician, too. I do admire her, don't you?'

No response for a couple of seconds, then, in a deep, earnest voice, that startled his companion by its suppressed fervour, came the answer—

'I love her. I love her with all my heart. She is the very sweetest woman in the whole wide world.'

Margery's heart throbbed, her lip quivered, she stole a side-long glance at her companion, who was gazing straight before him, his features, clear and pale in the moonlight, exalted and fervent. Something rose in her throat; they entered deep tree-shadows in a silence that was becoming oppressive, when Margery broke it in a studied tone with the words—

'She is indeed sweet. I suppose you have known her long.'

'Since I was seven; that was one-and-twenty years ago. Another fellow kicked me into the Old House. My head hit the door, I was stunned. I came to on that sofa, where first I saw her face. They kept me there all that day. I was living at the Rectory then with an uncle. I never remember a mother or a father; those dear ladies were all the world to me. I was rather out of it, a poor relation, at the Rectory.'

'Poor boy!' sighed Margery. 'It was in that same room that I first saw her,' she added; 'but she was on the sofa and hurt, not I.'

'And you were the ministering angel. She told me that you looked like one, standing in the sunlight. And you had picked her up, as she picked me up. I was jealous when I heard it. May I not see you into the house? Good-night, then.'

'Good-night.'

When Miss Ormsby passed her niece's room an hour later, on her way to bed, she was arrested by a sound that distressed her, and went in.

'Crying, Margie dear? Come, come, this won't do. What is it, pet?' she asked, going up to the bed and kissing the girl's wet cheek.

'Nothing, auntie; nothing at all.'

'But even girls don't cry for nothing at all.'

'I was only thinking of my sins, Aunt Julia; that is, my follies. Young men's sins are called follies, so young women's follies must be called sins, I suppose.'

'Come, dearie, go to sleep and wake good.'

'And wise. Did you ever read *Esmond*, Auntie?' she asked, suddenly starting up.

'Certainly. Thackeray's masterpiece.'

'I like Thackeray's works, but I don't like *Esmond*,' Margery exclaimed, vigorously turning from her half-raised posture, thumping her pillow as if it were a personal enemy, and nestling her flushed, tear-stained face cosily into it. 'Good-night, Aunt Julia.'

'Probably she is not quite well,' Miss Ormsby reflected, when discussing the subject with her sister, 'or homesick. Hardly a case for the doctor.'

'Not for *any* doctor,' Mrs. Wynne returned, with an air that mystified Aunt Julia. 'It's not *home*sickness, Judy. Margery is growing prettier every day.'

'Yes; so like her dear mother.'

'Margery must marry *well*. She must look higher than her mother did. She is a peer's daughter, Judy.'

'You don't think she cares for Vincent Alford, do you?' asked Miss Ormsby with sudden alarm; 'or for that Heathcote boy?'

'Certainly not. Margery has good taste. But she is quite as silly and romantic as other girls of her age.'

Whitsuntide fell late that year, in the first flush of the early June roses, most exquisite moment of the whole twelve months, when everything is, or has been, in bloom and before the young leafage has lost its freshness and variety. In Whitsun week the village concert was given. The choir sang glees; every one in the parish who could play any musical instrument without many mistakes played it. Margery's violin was in request, Gladdie Heathcote banged her banjo, Mabel played her mandoline, Maurice Bertram's voice and concertina having been discovered, his name adorned nearly every number on the programme. Gounod's *Ave Maria*, with violin *obbligato* by Miss Hilton, occasioned several rehearsals at the Old House; while glees, duets, and concerted music involved many practisings at the Rectory and school-room, these practisings leading to much wandering and sitting in the garden, tea-drinking, impromptu tennis, and carpet dances.

'So that the last few weeks have really been heavenly,' Mossy Besson rapturously confided to Miss Dorrien, the day after the concert, when drinking tea for the first time, by invitation, under the walnuts; 'and it's the best concert ever known in Barling. I was awfully nervous at singing with Margery Hilton to Dr. Bertram's concertina; but he promised me my notes and I don't think we came to grief often. I know *they* didn't; it was only

me now and then, and they hid it. Don't they seem made for each other, Miss Dorrien? Both so nice.'

'Dear Mossy, I can't imagine a more unsuitable match, if that is what you mean,' she replied gently. 'But don't imagine it; you are on a totally wrong scent.'

'Oh! but he worships her, and she is quite gone on him.'

'Now, Miss Mossy, what grounds have you for that statement?' Miss Dorrien asked, with a vexed gravity that surprised Mossy.

'Why—first of all, everybody says so. Then—just mention his name to Margery Hilton and see what colour she turns, and how she never speaks of him.'

'And what colour does *he* turn when *her* name is mentioned, and how does he never speak of her?'

'Oh! that's different. He speaks of her and says she is pretty and nice and clever and good, and it makes no difference to him when you speak of her. I am not quite sure he cares for her, but the others are. But there's no doubt that she is head over ears in love with him.'

Hardly were these words spoken, when Margery appeared, with vague expectancy and suppressed excitement in her soft grey eyes. She was always well dressed, knowing as if by instinct what was most becoming to herself and fittest for every occasion. Plump and rosy Mossy showed by her as a milkmaid by a fairy princess. Her sensitive face showed to Grace something like disappointment and disapproval at sight of Mossy, who addressed her as Margery, receiving the cold answer—Miss Besson. Scarcely had Margery taken a seat, and recovered from her disapproval of poor Mossy, when a firmer step rang on the gravel, and the tall figure of Maurice threw a shadow on the sunny grass.

Grace was obliged, in spite of herself, to see what colour Margery would turn; but, as the latter, adjusting her veil, moved round with some remark to guilty Mossy, who blushed furiously, her curiosity was balked. Bertram, having no veil to hide his blushes, and being obliged to raise his hat, stood with the full glow of the afternoon sunshine on his sun-browned face, which expressed only the usual warm affection the sight of his dear lady called forth. He shook hands with Mossy first, because she was nearest; for a similar reason, after having taken Margery's hand, he drew a seat to her side and occupied it, with apparent tranquillity and content. Then it seemed to Grace as if the two young faces turned instinctively to each other, like flowers to sun, and the world vanished from their thoughts. Yet

their conversation was commonplace, and soon became general. Presently the concertina appeared, and Mossy and Margery had to repeat their duet, and all were gay together for a sunshiny hour, at the end of which Margery took leave.

Then Bertram took up the bundle of books she had brought with her, saying that he was going her way, and would carry them; but Margery demurred, with civil thanks.

'Do let me take them, Miss Hilton,' he said in his impulsive way; but Grace interposed, quite unnecessarily, Margery thought.

'Nonsense, Maurice,' she said sharply. 'Don't worry Miss Hilton. If you want exercise, you can weed the onion-bed.'

Maurice stood still, as if under a blow, and went quite white; Margery felt as if a cold hand clutched her heart. With a gentle 'Good-bye, Dr. Bertram,' she turned to the garden-door, whither Grace accompanied her. Innocent Mossy wondered.

Just then Captain Besson came, as he often did of late in the cool of evening or morning, to garden for Miss Dorrien. He had discovered the market-gardening, and asked permission to take the exercise he needed at the Old House, his own garden being, as he said, about the size of a tablecloth. Thence had arisen intimacy, ripening to warm friendship.

A few days later Margery went to town rather hurriedly, so that she wrote a farewell note, instead of calling at the Old House, to say good-bye. She did not return to Barling till August, when she let several days pass before calling on Miss Dorrien.

'My precious child, it is like the return of spring to have you again,' the latter said when she appeared, folding her in her arms, and then holding her at a little distance to get a better view of her.

'So kind of you to say so, dear Miss Dorrien,' she returned, with a kind of civil restraint that chilled Grace, and reminded her of the coldness and infrequency of her letters. Margery was growing tired of her. She was sorry, but what was to be expected of this bright young creature on whom she had no claim.

'Are you not happy, dear?' she asked presently, after some lame attempts at conversation. 'Sorry to come back to Barling? Scarboro' must be far pleasanter just now than our relaxing south coast.'

'Oh, Miss Dorrien, it is not that,' she faltered. 'But, but—I ought to tell you, that my father——'

Grace lifted her head in a proud fashion, with closed firm lips and a sinking heart.

'Tell me, Margery—why should you be afraid?' she said in a cold voice.

'He wrote lately,' Margery continued, 'and said that you—you are—the lady, you are—Grace.'

'That is my name, Margery. *Après?*'

'Only that. Oh, Miss Dorrien, how could you? And you never told me. You spoilt his life. You broke faith with him.'

'No, there was no faith to break, no promise asked or given,' she replied with quiet sadness; 'but I suppose that you will not care for me any more now. It was not for me to discuss this with you. I wish he had kept silence too. But—I loved him, Margery,' she added, with a sudden fervour that recalled Maurice's 'I love her' under the trees. 'Oh, I loved him.'

'And left him?' Margery flashed back. 'How could you, how could you? And yet, dear Miss Dorrien,' she added more gently, 'you too must have suffered.'

'Women do suffer, Margery; because love and duty are not always together. Yet I loved him, and no other.'

'Is that why you are engaged to Maurice Bertram?' escaped Margery's trembling lips, almost without her knowledge.

'Engaged to *whom*?' Grace demanded with cold anger, her large dark eyes one flame, her erect figure quivering like a lance thrust in the ground. 'Who has dared to say that? Who dared imagine such a thing?'

Margery had also risen, and confronted the angry eyes, her slight figure stiff, her sweet rose-leaf face pale.

'Is it not true, then?' she asked.

'Who told you, Margery? I insist upon hearing. Who could dare?'

'No one told me,' she replied steadily; 'I thought it myself.'

'Pray don't imagine or think anything so absurd again. I need scarcely ask you not to repeat it, I hope?'

'I hope not. I am not given to that kind of thing,' she replied. Then all at once her self-control gave way, the defiance went out of her eyes, the flood-gates burst open, the graceful figure swayed and shook with sobs, the sweet face was hidden in the delicate hands.

'Please forgive me,' she gasped. 'I have been so wretched. And I loved you so much.'

CHAPTER X

ALL Grace's anger vanished at sight of Margery's emotion. Taking her in her arms, she sank into a chair, drew the girl on

to her lap like a child, kissed the tear-stained face and pressed it to her breast in silence, till the heavy sobs abated and the soft grey eyes looked up again with the dawn of a grateful smile.

'Now tell me all about it,' Grace said. 'What led you to imagine anything so outrageously absurd about my poor dear boy?'

'It was that day when he was singing Gounod's *Ave Maria*. I waited, not knowing who it was, for him to go away. Then there was silence so long I thought you must be alone, and came up. And then, dear Miss Dorrien, you were sitting there on the sofa. And he—he had one hand on yours and the other arm behind you, and his—his face was towards you—with—oh, such a look!'

Margery could not see her friend's crimsoning face, her averted gaze, and compressed lips.

'Margery, you are an extremely silly child,' she said sharply at last; 'surely you have been in the world too much, to fancy, like an ignorant school-girl, that life is nothing but love-making, or that men make love to their grandmothers.'

'Ah, but he *said* that he loved you,' pursued Margery very earnestly; 'when he was seeing me home in the moonlight, and oh, his face! "I love her, I love her with all my heart. She is the very sweetest woman in the whole wide world." Ah, his voice! That is what he said. I have known men in love, dear Miss Dorrien,' she added; 'what girl has not? And that is how they look and speak.'

'Strong feeling—religious, poetic, patriotic, erotic—is all the same in expression. Of course he is devoted to me, poor darling. But—why, Margery, whenever I look in his face I see a dear little curly-headed fellow of seven, with innocent, wistful eyes—a poor little hurt thing, that I lifted in my arms and healed and hushed. Oh, it is very terrible to be childless, Margery. May you never know it, dearest. That dear child had been kicked senseless into our house—the brave, affectionate little fellow, with his loyal little soul and strong sense of honour. You are both my darlings, but that poor boy—motherless, fatherless, loveless—came first.'

'That is what he said,' replied Margery, who had now risen from her childish posture and taken a seat by Grace. 'He told me how he was kicked senseless into the Old House, and came to on the sofa to look upon your face. All those years, he said, you and your mother were everything to him, he had no other home or anything like one. Poor boy! It was a sad childhood,' she added, with the tenderest little soft sigh.

'It strikes me that the conversation in that moonlit stroll was somewhat intimate,' Grace observed, with some amusement, noting the unconscious look of the down-cast face. 'You see, my poor boy has had no social training; he has the instincts of a gentleman, is naturally well-bred, but is quite ignorant of conventionalities. He talks to every one in the same way, and says just what he thinks at the moment. My mother, who saw no one, took to him marvellously. He reminded her of her only son, who died at Maurice's age. She often called him by my brother's name.'

'He is very clever, people say,' Margery added, 'he is more and more thought of at St. Ann's.'

'Really? Well, I hope he will make his way. Medical men are at a great disadvantage when single. I hope he will soon marry some nice girl, who will keep his house well, see that he is properly fed, mend his linen, make him comfortable when he comes home worn-out and stupid, make herself pleasant to his patients, and not be above putting her hand to anything. A country doctor's wife has to be practical, even homely. I think I know who I should like for him.'

'Gladdie Heathcote?' Margery suggested maliciously.

'Oh, Gladdie! After all, if she cared for him, she might not be the worst choice. The Heathcotes are not too well-connected, I hear. Gladdie's eccentricities all arise from want of congenial activity. She would tone down. But my choice would be Mossy Besson.'

'Oh, Miss Dorrien! That common—I mean—she is very nice; but surely such a man might look a little higher.'

'Certainly not an inch higher. He is of no family, has no connections, and needs a wife with just the little dower Mossy will have. She is made for him, though, of course, he is not yet in a position to aspire to that dear girl.'

'Oh! —hm! Ah,' was Margery's pregnant rejoinder; 'Mossy—I wonder if she has a Christian name? But surely, dear Miss Dorrien, Dr. Bertram must have influential friends and money, else how could he build that Convalescent Home at St. Ann's?'

'If I tell you a secret, will you keep it? That house is being financed by a friend of Lord Wotton's. When Maurice came here, he had an introduction from a chance acquaintance to Lord Wotton, who is also a connection of mine.'

'Then Lord Wotton must think very highly of him,' Margery thought but did not say, rising to go instead.

'Dear Miss Dorrien,' she whispered then, 'I have behaved abominably to you. But how could you forget? How could you leave him?'

'Did I forget him? Why, when you came that day and stood in the light, why was I so much drawn to you? Why did I recall some lost sweetness from youth in your voice and face? Why did all that you said and did, make me feel young and happy again? I could not tell until that afternoon at the sewing-guild. Then I knew. Good-bye, darling. Come again soon.'

'Make me feel young and happy again,' that phrase echoed all day long through Margery's brain, waking inexpressible sadness and foreboding. One load was thrown off her heart; two loads. Yet a new fear was born. She walked very sedately homewards, to find the drawing-room invested with Barling spinsters and widows, and local topics in full swing.

Why, she heard, did Miss Dorrien still resist all efforts to draw her into society, except sewing-guild meetings? Poverty was no bar. The Old House sewing tea had been sumptuous. Singular that she should write so much. One room was absolutely full of papers, foolscap, blue-wove, parchments, bills, estimates, littered everywhere. Did she eke out her income by copying for lawyers? A singular being, in spite of her proficiency with the needle. To think of her preventing Chip from sending his old worn-out pony to the knackers, giving it a home in the Old House stables, so long disused, and letting it crop the turf that grew in the orchard and over the disused courtyards. Chip and his wife had been heart-broken at the prospect of giving poor Jenny the happy despatch; Miss Dorrien heard it, and comfort suddenly came. Yet charity at the expense of others is simple enough. Every one knew that Lord Wotton's bailiff fed Jenny with his master's oats. Vainly did Mrs. Wynne introduce weather, war, newspapers, books; the conversation, a moment diverted, surged back to village gossip, and village gossip always plays most about the uncomprehended, any faint divergence from types. Perhaps, was suggested—Miss Dorrien, much beholden to her distant cousin, who was accustomed to pay her solitary visits, helped him, acted as a kind of clerk or sub-agent to his agent and himself. But Mr. Dolliver? Ah! that was insoluble. Then a happy thought suffused Miss Beauty Hanley's cheek; she cast the word *literature* to the talkers, like a ball among kittens, with the usual result.

Margery, flinging Scotch moors, grouse and French watering-

places, as pearls before conversational swine devoted to local husks, privately appropriated Miss Beauty's ball. But the parchments, red tape, seals, she had so often observed? Clearly literature would not do.

Jenny, the patient bearer of garden stuff to St. Ann's and Sandyknowe, had long been blind, her coat was sprinkled with grey, her paces uncertain. One day she stumbled and fell at the threshold of her stable. That day there was no journey to St. Ann's; the cart stood ready laden under the sycamore all day; there was sorrow at Chip's cottage, at the heavy sentence of the horse-doctor. The Chips and Jenny had grown old together, they loved her like a child, so Chip told Miss Dorrien with tears in his eyes. She represented a yearly income without which the ageing couple could scarcely get on. Mrs. Chip was rheumatic, Chip bent in the back and less hale than he had been. If Jenny could have gone on a few years longer, the marketing would have been possible, and something substantial put by for old age.

''Zims as though we've got to give up all with Jenny,' he lamented.

'Keep your heart up,' his mistress replied; 'you may pick up another pony cheap at market. Or Lord Wotton may have some nearly worn-out horse, able still to jog a few miles twice a week. Or you might get a donkey. But Jenny shan't go to the kennels. Perhaps I might buy some animal and let out to you, as you have let Jenny out to us all these years.'

This lengthening of Jenny's mortal span had occurred on a Saturday; it was now Thursday. Margery had scarcely left the Old House, when Chip, who had been at work in the garden, leaving his fork in the earth, strode with heavy haste up to the garden door, beckoning to Grace, who was passing through the hall.

'Hi, Miss, hi!' he called, forgetful for once of the proprieties of life, 'I got zummat to tell ye.'

'Something pleasant, Chip? Are the early peaches ripe yet? How about gathering the quarantine apples?' she replied, turning and slowly coming out at the door in the hot August sunshine.

'What ever do ee think?' he asked, his old brown face all aglow. 'I 'lows you wouldn't never vind out in a week o' Sundays.'

'How unkind of you not to tell me, Chip! You have heard from your son in Australia, perhaps?'

'Ah g'long! Don't want to hear about he. Shain't never hear nothen wuth a Queen's head about he. He done vor hisself when he married that there mis'able cheap bit o' traade he took out with en. Well, there ma'am, it es like this—what you said t'other day come true's marnen.'

'Well, Chip? I said that the silver Hamburg's chickens would be out, and they are out. I said those turkey poults would come back, and they came back——'

'Ah, goo an with ee, beggen your pardon, ma'am. I be that zet up, I 'lows, there ain't no bearen of me. My poor wold missus, she zet to and cried like a child, she was that glad. "Do ee think it's true, vather?" she zes. "Do ee 'low zomebody's ben a-riggen of ee out?" "'Lows 'tis true enough," I zes, zes I. "'Tes vull daylight, I bain't in liquor, as I knows on, and I bain't a bigger vool than I've a-ben ever since I was born—not as I knows on, I bain't." I hreckon it give me a steart, though. 'Twas zummat better than turkey poults I zeen's marnen. Couldn't come to tell ee avore. I'd a job to finish cutten vuzz up down vust. Wull, there, I got up's marnen; terble down-hearted I was too. I zes to mezulf, "Seth Chip," I zes, "you be getten in years, wold chap, and things is thirtover vor ee. But," I zes, "ef you gives in to this yere," I zes, "you'll hae to goo on under ground. Whatever be ee a-grizzlen over," I zes, "ye girt zote? 'Lows there's money in bank vor ee," I zes. "You've got this yer cottage and garden, and work over Old House, and a job here and a job there. You ain't wore out yet," I zes. "Your missus, she can keep about and do vor ee indoors, I hreckon, poor wold heart of her! What can ee expect of a wold ooman like she? Thirtover she is, and thirtover she've a-ben ever zence she got they rheumatics in her boäns. Do'ee 'low ee be so mis'able pleasant and chirpy yersulf?" I zes. "The Lord hev took care ov ee both this zeventy year, and ye haven't wanted a day's work or a male of mate ever zence ee've a-ben man and ooman growed. Goo an with ee, Seth Chip," I zes, "putt up with wold ooman's naggen, putt up with Jenny's breaken up. Goo on and work about so long as you've a-got strength for't, and thank the Lard." Well there, ma'am, with that I heartened up mis'able; and I done up vire, and putt the kettle on, and I thinks to meself, "Wold gal'll be glad when she comes hobblen downstairs." "I've a-made he comfortable many a year," she'll think to herself, "so wold chap's a-maken of me comfortable now I be pretty nigh weared out." With that I goos out back to vetch a pail of water vor her, and what ever

do ee think I seen when I opened door, a-standen out there in the sun, looken as pleased as Punch, wi' a girt white caird tied round 's neck, with "A present to Mr. Chip," hwrote in girt print letters on 't? Zure as ever I be standen in this here gairden, under your sun-dial, vive o'clock of a hot afternoon, 'twas a smeart young pony, just so much like Jenny growed young again as one of they yallow hroses is like another!'

He drew breath deeply, took off his hat, passed a large blue handkerchief over his forehead, and looked with radiant expectation at Grace, whose eyes were moist and dark with feeling, and her lips softly smiling.

'Really?' she exclaimed at last, after a pause of apparent stupefaction.—'Really, Chip?'

"You med well zay that, Miss Grace. Wold ooman, she zes, "Darned if I shouldn't zo zoon a thought of seeën my wold man growed young again, and garbed up vine in his wedden' cloase, as this yer little harse!" Mr. Barnes, he come over vrom *Bugle*, and he looked and velt her all over, opened her mouth and zeen she was hrisen vive year. "Tell ee what 'tes, Mr. Chip," zes he, "you 've got a good zound bit of harse flesh there as ever I zeen. Zound as a bell, quiet as a lamb. But where do ee think she come from?" "Well there, Mr. Barnes," I zes, zes I, "there's things I can tell ee and there's things I cain't. You med ast me why King Solomon, being, as is hrwrote in the Bible, the wisest man ever lived, harled hissulf up with hunderds and hunderds of women—a mis'able poor zart some on 'em was, too; good-for-nothen hussies as ever anybody yeared on. And you med ast me why it pleased the Lord to putt a man's strength into his earms and legs, and a ooman's into her tongue. And I med turn it over evenens and dinner-times, and I dunno but I might vind out; but if you asts me where that there little harse, as is standen there, come vrom, I so med well tell ee straight out: 'Darned if I knows!'"'

'You have no idea whatever, no suspicion of any kind then, Chip? Has your wife any clue to the mystery?'

'No, vear! Wold ooman never had no gumption to speak on. She zed she 'lowed the pony came from the saäme plaäce as Miss Braden's cow. Wold cow died, you minds, ma'am, and Miss Braden she made a deuce of a zet out. Presently wold ooman looks out o' window, and darned if there wasn't another cow, a vine young milch Alderney in vield, looken as though she 'd a growed there. 'Lows we all comes vrom the zaäme plaäce, when ee comes to that, cows and harses, wold oomen and all. Well

there, so soon as I 'd a done looken at little harse, I goos in shed and vinds a new cairt and a new zet o' hearness vor 'n. What do ee think o' that?'

'I think, Chip,' Miss Dorrien replied, with a sweet, grave smile, 'that your friend must have wished to make what you call a clean job of it. I think, too, that you will perhaps be kind enough to carry my garden-stuff to St. Ann's as before?'

'Praps! Goo an with 'ee, there ain't no prapses with Seth Chip. What?' he cried angrily, 'do 'ee think I be gwine to drow ee over after all these years, because I 'm hrose up in the world? There, take and goo an with 'ee, do.'

'Thank you, dear Chip. You have always been a true friend.'

'Ay, and I be always a gwine to be,' he growled, stumping heavily back to his bed of spinach with a frowning face, just as Bertram arrived, wanting to know the cause of the discussion.

'Only a lover's quarrel, Maurice. All right again. Come and take a peach from the wall.'

They strolled along the pleasant paths, between rows of sun-drenched flowers and great green apples and pears swelling and mellowing in the golden glow, Maurice talking of the Convalescent Home, whither he wanted her to drive with him to watch progress and give advice; Grace pre-occupied and grave. How much harm had Margery suffered, she was pondering; how much sorrow and disappointment was in store for Maurice? Why had she not foreseen and prevented this sad fiasco?

After all, she was not much to blame. They had met, as they must have met in any case, before that evening when they dined with her. Even then, she had laid her innocent snares for Mossy Besson. Yes; and he had not renounced what she styled his ridiculous folly then. It had revived in a mitigated form, after the singing of *Ave Maria*, while Margery was waiting below for the intruder to leave the house. Quite gravely and without excitement, he had told her how deeply it pained him to see her toiling for her very bread, and to know that she was denied all that she was born to. He loved her, and *always should love her*, she remembered that emphatic phrase—better than any one on earth; he would not be rebuked for saying that; it was his right. How many men could and did say that of a mother. A man might devote himself to the comfort and well-being of a mother or a sister, take her to his home, surround her with all she needed or he could obtain for her, as he so earnestly desired to do for his dear lady, but could not unless she bore his name and had some world-recognised relationship to him.

Therefore he had pressed their marriage, which need be no more of marriage than she pleased; he wanted only the right to support and care for her, enjoy her daily presence, and shield her from every possible ill.

But Grace had replied that marriage was a great and holy thing, not lightly to be taken in hand, by no means to be tampered with; a solemn mystery, easily profaned. Gradually it had come to this, during the discussion, that she owned to appreciating his devotion, and said that it would be no humiliation to receive his protection and help; when she needed anything she would tell him, he might trust her. For the labour he deplored, it was a pleasure, almost a necessity; she could not give it up. Thus a pact had been made before Margery came and stood shining in the sunlight, like some heavenly visitant from a purer world. Since then, Grace had observed him anxiously, and detected many signs of love-sickness. An abstraction quite new to him, those old-fashioned sighs 'like furnace' for nothing evident, a curious restrained eagerness when a certain name occurred in conversation, feigned indifference to it, combined with well-schemed manœuvres bringing round the talk to what led up to that name. And latterly, during Margery's absence, gravity verging on depression, dissipated in a moment by the lightest reference to anything connected with her.

'Have you seen Miss Hilton since her return?' Grace asked carelessly, when he turned, facing the full blaze of sunlight, to hand her a peach, which was near dropping on the ground in the thrill the question sent through him, and the ruddy glow of which was out-ruddied by his face, while he replied with constrained indifference that he was not aware of Miss Hilton's return, that these early peaches were of unusual beauty, and that inferior ones were sold at St. Ann's at a shilling apiece.

'And that wretched Grinham only gives me sixpence,' she said. 'What a Jew! Let us eat them all, Maurice; if one sells one's soul, one likes a good price for it.' Yet he knew that she was not thinking of peaches as they paced the turf walk, eating the fruit and looking over the sunny prospect of golden harvest-slopes and green down dinted with dark copse, to white and red cliffs and blue bloom of quiet sea, sail-dotted.

Gradually they arrived by way of up-sloping garden and orchard in a nut-shaded walk, in the midst of which was a stile leading immediately on to the down, near that tree beneath which Grace had rested one Sunday afternoon and thought over her last letter to Mark Hilton.

Leaning on the top bar and listening to sheep-bells and the soft sound of cropped turf, that distant day returned vividly to Grace's mind, with all its youth and passion, conflict and victory. There she had given pain and grief beyond her utmost imagining to the man she loved, thinking to pain only herself and perhaps inflict a faint, but wholesome, vexation on him. His daughter's indignation at his hurt was clearly misplaced; that denial—she wondered if she could have inflicted it if she had known—was probably better for him than anything she could have given him. She could never look at the tree without deep heart-stirring and re-opening of old wounds; many a tear had been shed there, many a heart pang struggled through. Thinking of his subsequent life and her own, she felt that she had been more kind than cruel to him on that day.

'It is cooler up here,' Maurice said, leaning at her side on the top rail. 'There is a curious charm about this bit, a vague aura of—I don't know what; a sort of spiritual perfume. Surely, places have souls; they are haunted by memories of things done and thought perhaps long and long ago.'

She turned to see a stray sunbeam filtered through the hazels, burning like gold in the fair hair that so often recalled another young head; there was in his voice and look a gravity that had long been growing on him, dispelling the late-lingering boyishness often so noticeable before. He was looking straight before him, unconscious of her gaze, fully seen, his hat removed to let the fresh air have free play.

'Must this pain come to *him*?' she wondered, but before she could speak, hot tears were raining on the bar upon which both leant.

'Darling!' cried Maurice, 'what is it? Not anything *I* said?'

'No, nothing, nothing,' was the reply, as the tears were dried and checked, 'it was only this, Maurice. Thirty years ago I sat under that beech tree and refused to marry the only man I ever loved: and I loved him with all my heart and soul, and I shall love him till I die. Nay; I shall love him for ever, while I have any being. Who knows but there may be some higher union than the marrying that is not where souls are as the angels?'

He had surrounded her with his arm and drawn her close as if for shelter.

'But why,' he asked, 'why?'

'It is a long story. The chief reason, certainly, was what you may easily guess. You knew my dear, dear mother.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I knew her,' and said no more, but looked at the tree and the turf and the sunny-fleeced sheep that were nibbling peacefully before their eyes.

'Was I right?' she asked presently. 'I tried to do right.'

'It is a hard question,' he said. 'It must have been right from one point of view. It is not for me to say. I know too little of the facts. But,' he added, in another voice, 'I know now why this is a holy place.'

They turned and went back through the coolness of slanting shadows and sweetening scents, hearing the first song of the robins and last of the swifts wheeling overhead in thick squadrons before flight. It was warmer down below under the walnuts and near the sun-radiating house walls.

'I wish I might stay longer,' Maurice said when they stopped, and Grace took a seat on a garden bench and motioned him to her side. 'But I am no longer an idle man. Half-a-dozen patients to see to-night at the healthiest time of year.'

'So glad to hear it, dear. But you may spare me just another five minutes.' So he sat near her in a companionable silence they were growing accustomed to. Presently she looked up quickly and turned to him, just as the last sunbeam shot across the garden and faded from the great grey down and lilac-tinted sea.

'Maurice,' she asked then, 'who and what was your father?'

CHAPTER XI

PEOPLE were always asking the cause of Maurice Bertram's rapid success. Why should a young, nameless man, arriving suddenly from nowhere—that is, nowhere known to St. Ann's and Barling—quickly build up a large practice and firm popularity, while Ralph Cartmel—many years his senior, with his father's respectable, old-established practice ready to his hand, his father's long-trusted and venerated self to fall back upon, and his young brother to bring fresh life and newest science into the firm—had much difficulty in keeping the practice together, was personally unpopular, and gained no new patients? When the right to success is questioned it is a sign of envy; and, according to cynics, envy is the test of success. Who was Bertram, people asked every day. The nephew of Canon Parker, formerly rector of Barling, was the reply. But not countenanced by that uncle and not a Parker. Had he ever a father? At any rate, Bertram

senior had never been heard of. It was rumoured that his mother's marriage had been a grief, if not a disgrace, to her family; some people questioned the existence of a marriage.

Why had this nameless man, young and penniless, power to plan and build these Convalescent Homes, of which St. Ann's was growing justly proud? No money connected with the Homes actually passed through his hands, yet architect and builder knew well that all depended on him. His story of an unknown millionaire financing the undertaking gained little credit. People do not often build convalescent homes; when they do, they like it to be known, and they like to plan it personally. But the very name of this eccentric philanthropist was unknown even to Bertram—so he maintained. No one for a moment imagined that he was himself the financier. Nor could it be any near relative, unless—unless indeed, it was sometimes suggested, the bar sinister were in this young man's escutcheon. And, in that case, was it likely that he would be content to fight his way as a medical practitioner at a small watering-place?

Thus, conjecture being exhausted, imagination leapt in, and singular and startling romances were woven on the invisible loom of his private history. But, as Ralph Cartmel always asserted, the Convalescent Homes were a good, solid foundation for his vogue, success, popularity, call it what you will.

During his second autumn at St. Ann's, an epidemic of typhoid —a natural sequence of house-building in advance of sanitation —broke out, and raged with violence. Whole roads and streets of new houses had sprung up like exhalations; they were financed by mortgages, building societies, and private speculators, too cheaply and quickly built to be healthy, especially in a town that was neither drained nor supplied with water. Population surged in like a wave, the houses filled, local wise-heads in authority shut their eyes and pinned their faith on pure sea air, and natural drainage into the sea. Typhoid, the inevitable fruit of this, ripened in good time; the local wise-heads who survived the scourge applied themselves to drainage and pure water supply. But scarcely had typhoid abated when the foul fiend Influenza descended—not only upon St. Ann's, but all over the kingdom—and prevailed through late winter and spring. It was enough to crush a much larger community, but St. Ann's had too many natural advantages not to weather the crisis ultimately.

These local calamities were priceless opportunities for surviving doctors, of whom Bertram was one; but their chief harvest

was not so much of gold as of reputation. Too many people died, were ruined or impoverished, to pay doctor's bills. At one time all the doctors within a radius of ten miles were prostrate; then pale and haggard creatures began to be seen driving about and tottering to bedsides, funerals gradually became less frequent, a wan and wasted population was seen in the streets, though many faces appeared no more. Summer obliterated all trace of the sickness, but the gaps it left; and local authority—importuned by medical science—borrowed money, and began public sanitary works.

But Ralph Cartmel maintained that Bertram made capital of everything, owing to his wonderful luck, and also to 'the beggar's confounded cheek and push.' His name was certainly conspicuous in sanitary meetings and reports, in local papers, and not in local papers only. It had become known locally that, though no doctors spared themselves during the epidemic, he expended himself more than any. The young Cartmels averred that he was tougher and more able to overwork during the prostration and fever of the sickness. Others thought him more willing; it was known that, as long as he had strength to get in and out of a carriage, he refused no visit to rich or poor. No doubt it was folly, no doubt these visits were sometimes doubtful boons to patients, but people liked the spirit of it. No doubt others did their duty gallantly, yet he bore the palm. And, when it was all over in the late spring, he was down with nervous exhaustion. Having been taken to the Old House to be nursed and healed, he convalesced sufficiently to go away for a change of air, returning blithe and buxom to his work.

'No wonder people like him,' Gladdie Heathcote was saying one late summer evening. 'He is so kind; his manner is so nice when one is ill.'

'What do you call nice, Glad?' retorted Mabel. 'Why, when you had the Flu he spoke to you as if you were some measly kid, and let you have whatever you wanted. He seemed as sorry for you as if he'd been ill himself.'

'I like a firm, manly doctor,' added Mossy Besson; 'one who speaks sharp and quick and stands no nonsense. Sick people need firm discipline, and no spoiling.'

Jim Cartmel deliberately winked at Gladys upon this; Gladys affably returned the classic salutation. Mossy coloured vividly; every one knew that, all the Cartmels having been down at once when Gladys was taken ill, Bertram had been called to the rescue of that young lady. She had been much impressed by

his walking straight up into her room one day, and falling down in a faint on the floor; but Mossy, having succumbed earlier to the plague, had enjoyed the services of Ralph Cartmel.

'I agree with Mossy,' said Jim; 'that's my treatment. If a girl is hysterical, put her under the pump; if an old ooman has nerves, play the garden hose upon her; if a man is bilious, shut him in a garret, and feed him on a bone a day for a week. Never let patients have anything they want. Nothing like discipline. So Ralph says. If I tell him some fellow doesn't seem to be getting on under treatment, he only swears, and tells me to put a blister upon him if he has any more of his beastly cheek.'

The sun had set, a soft sea-breeze played refreshingly over yellow harvest-fields, and made the Grange lawns pleasant after the hot sunshiny day. It was especially pleasant in the sheltered nook among evergreens, in which benches and chairs were disposed in the best form for conversation. This year the annual school-feast was taking place in Cliffe Grange grounds; the meadow next the house was dark with moving groups of children, the air full of shouts and laughter softened by distance. Everybody in Barling, and everybody visited within half a dozen miles of either house besides, went to the school-feast, whether it was held at the Rectory or the Grange. People tired of amusing children took refuge in this shady nook. Some half-dozen elderly and middle-aged ladies present readily caught and tossed the conversational ball thus thrown to them, while Gladys returned to her children; thus the merits and demerits of Bertram and his Homes pervaded the air and floated among the shrubs.

'Bertram for ever!' savagely snapped Vincent Heathcote, the rector's undergraduate son, penetrating to this cool retreat, and taking a seat as near Margery as possible. 'The divine Bertram, the admirable, the unblemished, the *intolerable* Bertram!'

'Fie, Mr. Vincent! The last word spoilt all,' reproved Miss Beauty Hanley. 'Rather copy than depreciate that excellent and agreeable young man. What—what is the matter?' she asked, somewhat taken aback at the irrepressible shout of laughter this innocent advice evoked from the younger people.

'Indeed, Miss Hanley,' Vincent replied, in a voice weak with laughter, 'I wouldn't venture to aspire to such heights.'

'Not even at Oriel?' continued guileless Miss Beauty, whose attention Miss Ormsby vainly tried to divert.

'Perhaps at Oriel,' he returned gravely; 'Oxford air is awfully

virtuous, they say. But it 's not Bertram's special kind of virtue —there are not enough women there for that. Undergraduates mayn't be seen walking out with any lady unless she is *vetera et horrida*, according to an old statute.'

'But surely Dr. Bertram is never seen walking out alone with Barling ladies,' interposed the younger Miss Hanley severely.

'Not even with veterans and harridans,' added Mabel, 'that is, not by daylight. He has too much sense to be seen, you bet.'

'My dear, I never bet, on principle,' pleaded Miss Beast.

'Neither does Bertram; if he did, he 'd pay up when he lost,' returned Heathcote.

'Mr. Heathcote,' cried Margery, whose face had been darkening more and more till her suppressed indignation suddenly burst bounds, 'are these personalities amusing topics? Is it quite dignified to be perpetually carping at one person, and he absent?'

'Awfully amusing, sometimes,' whispered Mabel to Mossy; 'poor old Vin! Talk of green-eyed monsters!'

'I don't carp at anybody, Miss Hilton,' replied Heathcote, smiling with fierce content at having roused her at last. 'If I did, could I carp at *your* best friends? After all, is it Bertram's fault if all the women in the place are in love with him? his fault if absurdly impossible virtues are ascribed to him? He isn't such a prig as the women make out, after all. And what if he is a bit of a bounder? It takes a good many generations to produce a gentleman. He isn't such a bad imitation, considering that he doesn't know who his father was.'

Vincent Heathcote was just twenty; he was mad with love and jealousy and the bitterness of refusal; he spoke savagely, his words rushing in a torrent he was powerless to stem. He looked steadily with dark defiance at Margery, whose eyes blazed with fury and whose cheeks flamed with it.

'And what if all the women in the place *are* in love with Maurice Bertram?' she flashed out, regardless, probably unconscious, of Miss Ormsby's furtive plucking at her sleeve and whisper of 'Margery, my dear Margery!' 'Any woman might be proud to be in love with such a man. And what if he had no father—which is a lie—he is the most perfect gentleman and the best man ever breathed. If there could be but one gentleman in the county, it would be he.'

Every word hit Heathcote hard; he quivered beneath his mask of defiance, quite aware that he had rushed upon his doom; horror prevaded the gentle spinsters and widows listening;

amusement and joy of battle filled the hearts of Jim Cartmel, Mossy, and Mabel.

'Bertram is a lucky chap,' the wretched boy returned weakly, 'though neither he nor anybody on earth knows who his father was.'

'Oh! as to that,' replied a cheerful, careless voice from the gloom of the shrubs behind the group, while two men in white flannels appeared in the deepening dusk, their footsteps unheard on the turf; 'if anybody cares to know who my father was, I can say he was George Bertram, colour-sergeant in the Scots Fusiliers. As to who was his father, nobody knows, probably nobody cares. Gentleman or not,' he added, lifting his cap to Margery, while their glances met in a quivering flame not to be mistaken, and he turned white as his clothing in the dim light, 'the title has been conferred on me by an authority beyond dispute.'

'Come along, you lazy beggars,' said the other white figure, Ralph Cartmel, turning to his brother and Vincent Heathcote; 'we are waiting for you to lend a hand with the balloon and fireworks; the rector's fuming; moon rising in five minutes.'

Jim and Vincent sprang up and followed the other two to the meadow, all four silent as the grave, Maurice white as death, Vincent red as fire.

Silence reigned among the ladies left sitting by the shrubs; even Mossy and Mabel were wordless for some seconds, then the latter said to the former in a low voice, 'Well done, Margery! I like a girl who has the spirit to stand up for the man she loves,' and Mossy returned, 'So do I, but I couldn't have done it'; and Miss Beauty Hanley rose slowly, observing stiffly that the dew was falling, and she had always heard that it was injurious to health to sit out of doors in the dew, and Gladys, returning at the moment, looked round in surprise, cheerfully asking, 'What's the row?' adding, 'Pater's on the rampage; he says we've all got to join in "God save the Queen."'

Margery had vanished in another direction to that taken by the four young men at the conclusion of Maurice's speech, stung and branded as she went by the whispered word 'unmaidenly.' Yet she was exultant. After all, the word maidenly covered an army of humbug. Are people—maiden people—to think of nothing but themselves and the effect they produce, or, are they to forget themselves for the sake of others? Is unasked love unmaidenly? then had she earned the reproach.

She fled down a long, dim alley that ran along the meadow

boundary, over-arched by meeting elms on either side, and ending in a gate that led out upon a lane rarely frequented. Here was perfect solitude, and a silence that was interrupted by softened sounds from the school-feast; rush and soft popping of rockets, shrill shouts of admiration at showers of falling stars, flashes of electric light, search-lights filtering even through this elmy sanctuary, childish laughter, childish cheers, the rise and fall of the evening hymn, the band's brass and drums beginning 'God save the Queen,' and overborne by voices.

A broad, yellow moon, past the full, rose out of the sea and shot a level lance across waves and meadows. Sweet moon, friend of lovers, Diana's own symbol, singularly comforting to Margery, in the passion and tumult that possessed her. Goethe was right; *Freudvoll und leidvoll* indeed is the wild sweet agony called love. Sounds from the meadow quieted, the moonlight grew and silvered, making blue shadows and dreamy outlines.

Presently she heard a step along the alley—oh! a step—firm, light, quick; the one step that makes the heart dance wild measures to it, the step heard only once a lifetime. She bent her head on her hands, shuddering; he, too, must be thrilling and trembling; there was no mistaking that look. What had he heard? 'Any woman might be proud to be in love with such a man?' Oh! that meant nothing, nothing but defence of the absent. The steps were very near now, heart-beats growing audible; she heard her name low-breathed; now the two white figures are side by side in the dappled blue shadows.

This audacity had not been intended; colder and more correct words had been rehearsed. But Margery's sweet face and spiritual eyes, uplifted with that expression, in the moon-rays, overcame all resolutions. Twining arms and meeting lips, what else could ensue?

'I couldn't help it; how could I? Brute, to take advantage of that sweet chivalry for the absent,' were the wildly stammered words she heard. 'I wanted to thank—to say—and—forgive me. I love you with all my soul. Margery, Margery, ever since that first dance here—do you remember? I called the nightingales—it was a May moon; they sang.'

'I remember it quite well,' was the calm and steady reply, all the excitement stilled to rapture.

'I meant never to speak. I know it could never be. I ask nothing. I have no right. You know who I am, you know who you are. But to love you! I have a perfect right to that.'

There was no response; voices of happy children going home,

with singing and cheers, came fainter and fainter, the band's bray and drum's heavy thump-thump, became musical in distance, the rumble of departing carriages rose and died away. After a long time, Margery spoke.

'If I were a man and loved a woman,' she said slowly, 'I would try to win her. I would do that.'

The moon-rays were no longer golden lances, but silver rain streaming through the elm arches with magical, moving charm, when the two white-clad figures at last issued from the long alley upon the lawn. There, in the full lustre of the moon, they surprised another pair, a white-clad man, who showed the startled face of Ralph Cartmel, and a pink-robed girl, who displayed the blushing cheeks of Mossy Besson; the latter, in spite of her confusion and quickly drooped gaze, observed that the dark *Camille de Rohan* rose, visible before in Bertram's coat, had changed places with some pink *La France*, formerly clustered in Margery's belt.

An upper window of the Old House, looking on Barling street, was lighted and uncurtained to-night; home-going children looked up, interrupting their medley of music-hall and hymn-singing and laughter with cheers, as they passed, and were responded to by a waved handkerchief from within.

Grace, looking up from the table at which she sat writing and examining accounts and other papers, thought of the child-like interest her mother had taken of late years in the simple festivity, watching the long train of flower-bearing children wind along under their banners and garlands, in their bright clothing, with an eager interest and cheerful toleration of the bang and bray of the village band, that brought tears to her daughter's eyes. Maurice had been there the last time that poor soul enjoyed the simple pleasure, sitting at her side pointing things out, with a face of awed pity and wonder—the cheap toleration and scarcely veiled contempt, that often woke her indignation on other faces, was always absent from his. The dear lad was at the Grange to-night; she had seen him spin past on a bicycle while the sun was still an hour above the horizon; a school feast in a parish not his own was an odd festivity for a very busy young doctor. But she knew the attraction—the small and friendly supper-party, followed by music, perhaps dancing, which ended the day. Why would he not heed her warnings, instead of fluttering like the moth she caught and put in safety round the flame that could but consume him?

All the life of the village was visibly flowing past her window;

these went by and those, on foot or otherwise; now a country gentleman's wagonette or village cart, now a farmer's, now a more aristocratic vehicle, now a bicycle flashing along with tinkling bell and glow-worm lamp. The expectation of which she was hardly conscious was perpetually balked. Now the road was silent and deserted; Mursell's good-night signal had been shown at her window and answered; it was late, the moon-lit night growing chill, the window was shut; Grace paused at her writing, her head propped on her hands, in weariness new to her superbly healthy frame.

'Old age stealing on,' she said to herself, 'better to go to bed and sleep.'

> 'If thou wouldst ease thy heart
> Of love and all its smart,
> Then sleep, dear, sleep!'

But what is this? Her face flashed as in youth; all weariness vanished at the tremble of a bell, the ruby glow of a moving lamp in the gloom, and the pale gleam of a white figure, skimming swiftly to the door and stopping, with a light leap to the ground, and an upraised face to the lighted window.

In a minute Maurice had stormed in, sprung up the polished stair-case and flashed into the room, with that new wild radiance on his face.

'What, writing, dear, always writing?' was his preoccupied question, awaiting no answer.

'What have you been doing, Maurice?' she asked sharply, as one who foreboded mischief.

The story was soon told; he was kneeling like a child at her side; his arms on her knees, his face hidden in his hands.

'Poor boy, poor, foolish boy, poor, flame-drawn moth!' she said, softly stroking the close-cut, darkening hair. 'Of course, you will call on those aunts to-morrow, and of course they will require you to keep away till the father has been asked. His answer will be, No; many times no.'

'You think you are crushing me,' he returned, raising his head to a level with hers. 'But nothing can crush me to-night.'

She swept back the hair that was brushed like a bird's wing across his forehead, and kissed him between the eyes. 'You must crush yourself,' she said gently.

'And Margery? Is she to be crushed in the wretched birth-and-position mill? No; many times no.'

'Which shall you choose, Maurice, her happiness or yours?'

'Both. Hers first, of course. You don't know what she is to me. She has divined it all along. It began at that first dance, when you——'

'When I put the flower in your coat and offered you the broomstick to dance with,' she replied, pitilessly gazing into a crimsoned face. 'Moonlight in April; moonlight in May. What a change! Poor Romeo! What did I prophesy? But you must crush it, Montagu.'

'Ah! you are too hard. Didn't I crush it down for a year and a half? But now—when I know—*Madonna mia*, when I *know* that she—she loves me——'

'Stuff! A chivalrous impulse, at twenty—in a girl! Maurice, will you never be a man? You want more kicking and knocking about than you ever had as a child. Will you take advantage of her and spoil her life?'

He had risen and stood before her.

'As for kicking and having nonsense knocked out of one—*your* friends never lack such discipline,' he said bitterly. 'Good-night, Miss Dorrien.'

'Maurice! You are not going?'

'No more kicking, thank you, to-night,' was the sullen answer.

'Come and be kissed instead then, great baby. Maurice,' she added sadly, when he relented and sat by her, 'the thing most conducive to my personal happiness would be to have you two married and settled near me. You two'—the voice broke and paused long—'to domineer over and keep in order,' she added, recovering. 'I can't do without somebody to bully.'

'Darling,' he replied in his quick caressing way, 'come what may, you will always have me to domineer over. I owe everything to you, even my own sweet love, for it was in this room she first found it out. But you will always be first, *madonna*. What it is to pass this house and know who is here, the heart of it, the hidden treasure! Oh! dearest, that first childish healing here at your hands, and that second, after all the torment, this spring. To creep into this sweet home and be near you, healed and hushed and loved, to forget all the toil and sickness, like a child in a mother's arms! Dear, that gold cup, see how the light lives in the rubies—buried in the gloom and silence of centuries and chanced upon at last; that is your emblem.'

'Come, Master Maurice, I hope I am less useless than the cup while it was buried. And don't talk of being in love with a woman who isn't first with you. Good-night, dear lad.'

It was very early next day when Margery came flying like a

fluttered dove to the Old House, with her true love-tale of hopes and fears, but hopes above all.

'I don't care what the aunts say, I *know* that my father will consent when he hears,' she burst out, childishly nestling in Grace's arms. 'After all, what *is* this absurd difference they talk about between a soldier's son and a soldier's daughter?'

'What indeed? Especially when one thinks of the equality rigidly observed in the army, the way in which sergeants and field-marshals fraternise together, the total absence of distinctions between——'

'Ah! now, but you know what I mean. If my father only knew Maurice! Of course I have *mentioned* him in my letters. I told him how you came to know him, and of the friendship between you.'

'My precious child, you can't expect your father to consent to this, indeed. You must be prepared for disappointment. Unless you love my poor boy well enough to wait years and years for him——'

'Ah! but I do,' came with quick fervour from the tender young mouth and warm young heart, 'I do indeed, indeed.'

There was that in the beautiful grey eyes, upraised to Grace's searching yet tender gaze, an earnest sincerity, a depth of loyal devotion, a pure warmth of passion, that carried conviction to her heart.

'Poor darling,' she said, kissing the delicate face, 'this love is a hard master.'

'The cup, the gold-treasure-cup,' Margery cried, emerging with wet eyes from the close embrace, and catching the dance of reflected sunbeams upon the jewels, 'I shall always love it. The sun fell through his hair upon it that evening, and I thought my heart would break. I was jealous of *him* for being before me with *you*, dearest Miss Dorrien—and ah! you remember the rest. That dreadful pang showed me first how dear he might become. And then—what an evening it was! We three! You were always a bond between us, a sort of centre of affection. We each went to you to hear of the other.'

'And now I shall lose you both, Margery. For, if one comes here the other must not, if you are not to meet, as will surely be required.'

So it fell out. First the aunts exacted a promise from each not to meet till Lord Hilton's answer could arrive from the ends of the earth. The days were counted to the earliest possibility of this, and yet were shorter than the calculation; because Lord

Hilton, whether in wrath or mercy, at once telegraphed a brief, emphatic 'No,' that rolled like thunder through their hearts, with such prolonged reverberations as seem to youth eternal.

CHAPTER XII

In the hazy October sunshine it was joy to be alive and listen to the quiet of sunny field, hushed sea, and violet-shadowed down. Even Bertram, who supposed himself quite broken in heart and hope by the recent parting, and the very firm though courteous refusal Margery's father had written him, citing reasons therefor in such plain fashion as even the blindness of love could not but perceive, felt hope revive against reason, as the elemental joy of life and youth awoke in him and painted all in auroral glamour. Along nut-shadowed lanes, over open downs, on white ribbons of road, by cottage and farm, village and sea, his quick-trotting bay colt flew, pulling pleasantly at the bit, and stopping reluctantly here and there to drop his master at this door and that, and flying off again as soon as he felt his weight upon the step of the light dog-cart, while dream after dream floated through Bertram's brain, and scheme after scheme unfolded itself, dream and scheme alike originating from and circling round the graceful figure and exquisite face of the loved girl, who was doubtless thinking and dreaming of him. Schemes for making money, for achieving position, for rising to her level and providing a fit nest for this sweet bird. The lovers might neither correspond nor meet; hard fate borne with comparative ease, because of tidings that must pass through a mutual friend. Hard fate, but submitted to by this headstrong lover, who saw no reason why he should not carry her off in the teeth of everybody, as a test of their mutual attachment and a sign of filial courtesy and respect.

'But marry her at last, I will,' was a sentence twice occurring in the rejected son-in-law's letter of filial submission to the obdurate father.

By this time Bertram's knowledge of local topography was extensive and accurate, though it had the singularity of placing Barling on the road to every conceivable place, either there or back, a singularity long since acquiesced in by the smart youth in top-boots, who daily risked his bones in his company behind the fiery young bay.

'Take him to the *Bugle* and wait there, Robert,' was a familiar sentence to this youth, at a certain point on Barling down, when

the reins were transferred to him, and the cart lightened, by a sudden bound, of the burden of his master, whose quick step over the sward and plunge into a fringe of hazels indicated a visit to the Old House by the historic beech and through the orchard, now rich as Hesperian gardens, with golden apples and pears, varied with red and brown and purple, weighing thick-set boughs to the grass.

Here at his ease, making pleasant experiments on the comparative merits of ruddy pippin, bursting fig and juicy pear, Bertram perceived a boy, bigger than the boy he had been when making similar trial of the merits of ripe fruit there, and dressed for riding. Bertram marvelled at what he called this boy's cheek; he wished himself seven again that he might have the pleasure of fighting him.

'What are you up to here, youngster?' he asked, taking him for one of the numerous orchard robbers round.

The boy stared in astonishment, but made no immediate response, owing to the presence of a large purple fig in the gate of speech. Bertram had just taken him gently but firmly by the collar, when he caught sight of two figures pacing the broad turf walk next the orchard in earnest conversation, and recognised his dear lady and Lord Wotton. Like a flame, then, it shot through him, that Wotton was the man refused under the gnarled beech, refused but loved still.

'And what does the insane young donkey propose to settle upon her?' Wotton was asking.

'Ask first what he proposes to keep her upon, poor boy. His sole capital, all his lands and revenues consist in his wits, which are fairly good, when he's not in love.'

'And in nothing better, Grace? How about character, how about heart? Character is a source of income, a factor in the production of wealth, a strong one, entirely ignored by socialists. And heart, the power of loving and cherishing and being loyal, that is a different kind of gold, worth the ransom of all the kings upon earth. I'll never thwart a child of mine who has conquered that rarest treasure, the warm enduring love of a heart of sterling gold.'

'Are you sure that the best for love, in love, is possession, Eustace?'

'How can I tell?'

'Is early happiness, too easy success, good for character? "Earth being so sweet, would Heaven seem best?"'

'That is not for human wisdom to decide. Happiness is not

too common or too lasting. Surely we should give all we possibly can, and leave the medicinal bitters for Heaven to mix. That often seems to me our part in the business of life, to lose no opportunity of giving happiness.'

'There he is,' she exclaimed, perceiving the tall figure of Maurice in the orchard and beckoning to him. 'What is he doing with the boy?'

The fig having gone to the proper place, the boy had wriggled away with a sharp retort, Bertram arriving at the conclusion that he had collared little Lord Barling, Lord Wotton's eldest son.

'I took you for one of the boys who are always stealing fruit,' he explained, with a friendly bang on his shoulder. 'What an eel you are!'

The sight of this boy, and still more that of his father, in the charmed intimacy of the Old House, pacing, as he held it his especial privilege to pace, the sward with Grace, was horribly disquieting, especially in the light of that sudden illumination about the beech-tree idyl. He knew with everybody that Lord Wotton sometimes visited his cousin, but he had never met him there, and had no suspicion of the intimacy of their friendship. What did this man mean by being at home in his paradise?'

'You come at the right moment, dear Maurice,' Grace said. 'We were discussing your Homes.'

'Not *mine*, your rich friend's,' he corrected.

'The house and grounds at the west gate are for sale,' Lord Wotton explained. 'What do you think of acquiring that property for the resident physician's house? As he is to be a general practitioner if he likes, it would be better than building a new house on the other land in the same architectural style. It is Wellfields House, don't you know, between St. Ann's and the Homes.'

'Splendid for the physician, Lord Wotton. But the property is valuable; it would fetch a high price, surely. Of course you might throw part of the grounds into the Homes land.'

'Mr. Dolliver has the first refusal of it, Maurice,' Grace added. 'And his rusty, musty, crusty old millionaire client is willing. The physician is to have three hundred a year. The house and grounds being rent free——'

'Lucky beggar!'

'You will have no objection to the post, Bertram, we suppose?' Lord Wotton added.

Maurice flushed and was silent, looking down on the sun-flecked grass.

'I am afraid,' he said presently, 'that I am not eligible. I have chosen all the officials and it is known. My position would be a false one. I could hardly appoint myself.'

'Why not?' Wotton returned. 'You might be the financier, you might be building these Homes entirely as a private enterprise, either for profit or philanthropy. In that case you would, of course, appoint yourself.'

'Lord Wotton,' Bertram replied, 'I am convinced in my own mind that you are the generous capitalist to whom we owe the building of these Homes. And I thank you most cordially for your magnificent gift to the town and the public, and present generous offer to myself, to accept which would be to make me. But I cannot accept this appointment without, at least, thinking it over first. It is far too good for a young man. It ought to be reserved as a comfortable nest for some older, breaking-down man. He might be a sort of invalid himself. These Homes have been my one piece of soul-work; it would be a miserable piece of bathos if all my dreams and schemes and hopes about this thing were to culminate in my own personal advancement.'

Instead of replying, Wotton turned to his ten-years son.

'Have you heard and understood what Dr. Bertram said, Barling?' he asked, and the boy replying in the affirmative; 'Never repeat and never forget it,' he added.

'I am not the financier, I give you my word of honour for it,' he then said to Maurice, 'but I know him, though less intimately than my cousin does. A queer fellow, Bertram, full of whims and strange notions and plans for serving humanity. Money he calls dirt. I suspect you of some affinity with him. Well, well, I hope you mean to be a bachelor all your days, for you'll never make your fortune. But think it over before you decide finally.'

'I shall think,' Maurice said to Grace, when the others were gone; 'but I think I shall always think the same.'

'Trust you for that, Master Headstrong,' she returned, with a soft, loving gaze. 'People would call you quixotic, dear, and you will never be able to marry my Margery.'

'Won't I?' was the emphatic rejoinder.

That evening Grace wrote a long letter. It began thus: 'My dear Lord Hilton,—You have doubtless long since fogotten me and the pleasant friendship begun at Mentone. And I sincerely hope that you have forgotten a slight vexation I once caused you on account of a misunderstanding on both sides. The fact that you have a sweet daughter who has won my heart, is conclusive and pleasant proof to me that the misunderstanding produced

no permanent pain. Your dear child has probably told you how our acquaintance began. I trust, and have cause to think, it may never end.' The letter concluded with the sentence, 'All I have written is under seal of secrecy, even from the young people themselves.'

Was she writing to Mark Hilton? she wondered, when she folded the long script of many sheets and addressed it. It was thirty years since she had composed the last letter under the beech in the autumn sunshine, time enough for children to be born and grow up, play their part and die, leaving another generation to succeed them. Or was she indeed that young woman in the full bloom of beauty and hey-day of life, whose heart had bounded with a passion so deep and pure? Had she realised what she was doing in that letter? Fully; and she did not wish it undone; she was satisfied with the travail of her soul.

'Yet I should like to see him once more, only once,' she thought, and Margery's phrase, that had become to her musings as the burden of a song, floated through her mind, 'looking splendid on his charger.'

St. Ann's Convalescent Homes were opened with ceremony by royalty, in December; the resident physician was a middle-aged man, from a manufacturing town in the north, whose health was breaking up from climate, work, and family anxieties. It was new life to him; paradise to wife and children; as good for the convalescents as the appointment of a younger and stronger man would have been. The chaplain was from the East of London, his appointment was only for a year of rest. St. Ann's, Barling, the whole countryside, rang with the injustice of appointing a stranger in place of Bertram; people openly condoled with him.

'Letting the fellow practise as well,' Ralph Cartmel cried. 'You might have managed better than that, Bertram. You seemed to be bossing the whole show at one time.'

This observation was made on Ralph's return from a brief honeymoon trip, in hearing of Mossy, who was anxious about trunks, and innumerable small parcels, at Barling Station.

'Thank you, Dr. Bertram,' she said, taking a rug he handed in to her, as she sank into a corner of the piled-up carriage, 'that is really all. I'm so glad you happened to come. My husband is of no more use than a cow.'

'So my old ooman thinks,' the latter added tranquilly, as the pair drove off to their new home, radiant, enchanted with each other. Maurice, a solitary figure, looking after them, remembered

the summer night at the Grange, when two pairs of newly-plighted lovers had surprised each other in the moonlight.

'You should have seen Mossy's "husband," and Cartmel's "old ooman," dearest,' he said, when he turned in at the Old House, and took Grace away from her papers to the fire-lit drawing-room. 'Mossy thinks no girl ever had a husband before. She expected the porters to envy her. As for old Ralph, he is like a fox with three tails, but evidently expects his old ooman to transact all the minor business. He's a rough specimen, good-hearted, thick-headed. He lit a pipe in her face! And you wanted *me* to marry her! Thank goodness, you can't now.'

'But I didn't know then that she wanted a husband to light pipes in her face, and call her old ooman in the honeymoon, Maurice,' Grace explained. 'Dear little Mossy is worth a better fate.'

'Oh! of course she'd *rather* have had me. Perhaps she took Cartmel out of pique. What a row those bells are making! "Three blind mice!" Enough to turn one's brain.'

'I quite see that the grapes are sour, my young friend. Poor dear Mossy's wedding-bells! I daresay Ralph is loudly cursing them. It never struck me till now, that Barling ought to have a good peal of bells. That fine old tower. How the music would swell over the downs, and mellow across the sea! One grows so accustomed to deficiencies, one forgets them. Now tell me your news, dear. You can stay the evening, I know, by the concertina.'

'My news is good, and yet it's bad,' he replied, taking his usual seat by her, on a sofa drawn to the fire. 'Perhaps I should say all good. It's—a—a—sort of legacy, I suppose. It represents about five hundred a year.'

'Really? But what harm is there in five hundred a year? What latent devilry resides in that sum? Would eight please you better?'

'*Madonna cara*, I'm an ungrateful cur. I'm afraid it isn't enough to melt old Hilton's heart, which is so tantalising. The old rascal——'

'Maurice, you are past praying for—Margery's father! I wouldn't have looked at a man who spoke so of mine.'

'—And then, darling, you see, of course I made a clean breast of it to—ah—his lordship. I told him of the bar sinister, which gives me, through my father, some of the very best blood in the peerage, not that his grace, my paternal grandfather,

acknowledged it. But this legacy coming from him, emphasises the blot on the scutcheon.'

'Coming from whom, Maurice?' she asked in amazement.

'Why, from the Duke of Ormonde. To be sure, the thing is done through a solicitor, and called a gift from an unnamed friend. But the duke's recent death—and this unexpected windfall together——'

'My dear boy, the poor man recently dead was an old flame of mine; he couldn't possibly be a grown man's grandfather. He was only a year older than I am.'

'*Cara mia!* Not the man refused under the beech?' he cried.

She flushed and looked vexed. 'Not that man, Maurice. You ought not to jump at conclusions. The person connected with you must have been the late duke's father. Fetch me that old Peerage. There he is—Bertram George Emilius Clarence Augustus, fifth Duke of Ormonde, ninth Earl of Kendal, tenth Baron, etc. etc.——'

'Hm—ha! But where can it come from? I don't even *know* a rich person. The Parkers—besides unanimously hating me in one solid phalanx—haven't a penny to bless themselves with. Oh, darling, *do* you think five hundred a year enough to soften the stony heart—of that noble lord?' he asked earnestly. '*How* I would bless the giver if it would. Only——'

'Well?'

'Do you think I could keep all that for myself? Do you think I could enjoy it, even with my own sweet love, unless you had at least half?'

'Dear Maurice, I have enough for my wants and more. When they increase, you are to be my banker, you know. But my greatest earthly happiness would be to see you two married and settled near me. Take the guitar now, and sing. I'll harp for you. Then dinner will be served, and we'll dispute again.'

'What shall it be, "I fear no foe in shining armour"? No, sing with me, "Oh that we two were maying!" first.'

The duet died away; Grace left the room; Maurice bent over the golden treasure-cup, crowned at this Christmas season with pearls of mistletoe cut from the orchard, and thought of things. A solitary candle redeemed the room from total darkness when the firelight sank; Grace had taken the other with her. The fitful light played on the golden cup, the rubies and the pearly berries, and two great tears that fell from Maurice's eyes; his shadow darkened half the room.

He turned away, stamping impatiently, made up the fire, and sat before it, watching the dance of flames, dreaming and castle-building, with a singular, pleasant feeling of invisible companionship. Surely there were spirits in the haunted room of that haunted house. Perhaps the sweet spirit of Margery herself, coming in, clothed with sunlight, as on that sweet May evening, the spirits of her music, her violin *obbligato* to *Ave Maria*, the spirit of many delicious hours spent there together since, surely——

His eyes were darkened by the sudden passage of two hands across them from behind him; there was a light rustle of silken drapery behind his chair, the sound and sense of quick light breath in his ears, the word in a soft, artificial whisper—

'*Devinez!*'

He trembled, turning white, with quick heart-throbs; then, without speech or any other movement, he gently pressed the warm slender hands closer over his eyes—it could not be true; it must be a sweet illusion born of the dreamy warmth, magic lights, and exquisite mingling of memory, passion and desire. But the warm soft hands were live and real, they tingled with young blood, he felt the leap of their tremulous pulses, the light breath drew nearer and nearer, was even in his hair, a soft face lightly touched his head a moment; yet it seemed madness to move, lest the entrancing spell should break, the dream vanish: besides, nothing—not the closest embrace, the warmest certainty of responsive passion—could be a tithe as exquisite, as this moment of half-certain dream-rapture.

Thrilling and tremulous, he drew the hands downwards to his lips; the uncertainty vanished, not hands only, but arms, daintily white and of exquisite rondure, were now visible in the uncertain light, which also drew fire-flashes from a jewel upon one wrist. Parting the hands, he rose and turned, and saw Margery standing, bright-eyed, rosily flushed, exquisitely dressed in a simple satin gown of delicate pale green, a bunch of white roses on her breast, and, quivering fierily on her white neck, opals pendent from a necklet of gold round her throat; the arms, bare to the shoulder, gleamed white from the shining satin. But the eyes, velvet soft, yet alight with pure flame, the eyes raised to his, were worth all.

Speechless still, and half-blind with tears of rapture, he could only open his arms, and fold this sweet vision of maiden beauty to his heart.

'But the *parole*, darling?' he asked presently, standing back

from her to delight in her beauty. 'I gave my word not to meet you.'

'I am here with my father's permission, Maurice, especially to meet you by Miss Dorrien's invitation.'

'I can't understand it, Margery. Darling, how beautiful, how very beautiful you are,' he cried, sinking on one knee, with clasped hands, to survey her at more advantage.

'Am I?' she exclaimed with childlike pleasure. 'I'm so glad, dearest; I tried to look as nice as possible for you. This is my very favourite frock.'

'Sweetest angel! The frock is almost good enough for my blossom,' he murmured, gently and reverently raising the satin hem to kiss, and dazzled in the act by the revelation of delicate laces and satin shoes beneath.

'Wasting kisses on a frock!'

'My own precious love! It seems like some blissful dream. It *can't* be true.'

'Is that a dream? and that?' she asked, laughing.

'A good solid pinch, by George! Little vixen! Where are you, sweetest?'

'I'm here, stupid. What, didn't I pinch hard enough? There!'

'Thanks, darling; that was very real. But where and why and how did you come? I'm dazed with the sudden bliss and afraid you'll melt away in a minute. Have some compassion on my scattered wits, Margery.'

'Do sit down and be sensible, then. My father has written to me, enclosing a letter for you. Would you like it? There, then.'

'That'll keep,' he said carelessly, slipping it into a pocket; 'and now tell me——'

'Tell you, indeed! Really, Dr. Bertram, I wonder at your presumption,' she replied coldly.

'But what have I presumpted? What have I done?' he pleaded.

'Nothing; that's why it's so impertinent,' she frowned.

'Darling, how unkind you are! Just as you've been so sweet, too. Why are you angry with your own Maurice?' was the pathetic rejoinder.

'Because you are such a donkey,' she replied with cutting wrath. 'I thought that you wished to—ah—marry me.'

'Dearest! Why, I never wish anything else from morning till night.'

'I believe you'd rather have Mossy Besson.'

'Ah! but I can't; she's Mrs. Cartmel now,' he replied with sudden calm.

'Or Gladdie Heathcote.'

'Understood. But she forswears marriage for bikes and swear-words.'

'Or even Miss Beast.'

'Dear Miss Beast! But she won't have me. She tells me to ask the young ones first.'

'How unkind you are! Well! I suppose you don't want *me* at any price, then.'

'How can I when I've got you, darling?' suiting the action to the word.

'But not to keep,' she sighed, submitting to the sequent embrace. 'What would you give or give up for me?'

'My precious angel, what wouldn't I? Everything but honour and right.'

'Your profession? Father wishes it, you know.'

'Oh, darling, that *is* a hard one. Would he have given up his?'

'Sophist! *Would* you? Yes or no.'

'And take the distaff from Omphale and waste away life at her feet? If it were a *sine quâ non*, I suppose I—Oh! I *can't* live without you, darling, darling!'

'Then you shan't. And I'll never ask you to throw away your club, my own dear Hercules, never.'

'But how,' Maurice remarked afterwards, when the two were dining happily under the scowl of Henry the Eighth, 'how it has all come about is what I cannot make out. The place seems to be enchanted. People are always having cows and ponies and fortunes and lovely brides mysteriously presented to them in this blessed little Barling.'

'And convalescent homes and rude sweethearts,' Margery added sedately.

'And friends,' Grace said, enfolding the beloved young lovers in her soft lustrous gaze. 'Street doors open and dear little boys tumble into one's arms from nowhere in particular, without the slightest warning. Don't be tiresome, Maurice! And then, when one is all alone, helpless and starving and depressed, street doors open again, and out of the sunshine sweet girl-Ariels fly in and make people happy, light their fires, cook their dinners, play violins and—fall in love with the boys, marry and forget all about one.'

'When we forget you, darling Miss Dorrien, we shall have long

forgotten each other,' Margery said with deep feeling, and Maurice indorsed with characteristic fervour.

'I have suspicions—dark suspicions,' Maurice added, 'of that blessed old rascal of a millionaire. The old villain seems to take a perverse pleasure in putting people under obligations to him. But even he, unless he were an intimate friend of Lord Hilton's, or at all events a man whose character was known to be a guarantee of what he thought of other people's, could not have led him to speak in that kind and flattering way of me.'—'What I hear of you personally from those who are in a position to form an estimate of your character, convinces me that I may safely intrust my child's happiness to your keeping,' was the passage of which Maurice was thinking.—'Could it be your aunts, Margery? No, they were always kind and civil to me, but—they would never think me good enough for you. Miss Beast? No. Lord Hilton wouldn't trust her. Darling, we must go together to tell Miss Beast, in strictest secrecy, of our engagement. Lord Wotton? Ah! I've hit it now.'

'But papa scarcely knows Lord Wotton, Maurice. I should not go to Newcourt except as the aunts' niece—Oh!' she cried suddenly, turning crimson and then stopping short at a look from Grace, who chose that moment to rise from the table.

'What is the matter?' Maurice asked.

'Nothing, nothing. I suddenly remembered something,' she replied; but in the hall she wound her arm round Grace and whispered, 'I know now, darling, I know all.'

'Say nothing, Margery,' she returned. 'Make no more guesses; it is not fair.'

Three happier people had seldom passed a happier evening than that which flew on golden wings in the faded drawing-room, so swiftly, that when the clock on the stairs struck twelve, there was a suspicion that the blissful human atmosphere might have quickened its metal pulse and stolen at least two hours from them. Favourite songs were sung, Margery's violin, Grace's harp and Maurice's guitar accompanied the voices. Then Maurice took the concertina, and shook music from it with one hand and pressed melody from it with two, standing before them with the graceful motions the instrument exacted, that so well set off his tall, elastic figure, while Margery, with roseate cheek pressed to Grace's arm, looked and listened and loved him more and more every minute.

There was much to discuss and plan when the music ended and the betrothed pair sat one on each side of Grace on the sofa

by the fire; when and where the wedding was to be, the possibility of Lord Hilton's coming home in time to be present, and of Mark being his father's substitute to give the bride away, of the house they were to live in and its plenishing, and of wonder as to the aunts' opinion on all these subjects.

Suddenly, without any apparent cause, a gush of hot tears fell from Grace's eyes upon the two young hands clasped on her lap in one of hers.

'It is nothing,' she said in response to their questions, 'nothing at all. Only I am so happy to-night. It is as if I had gone back to the time before the troubles, and they were all alive again; Father and Mother and little Laura and dear old Grannie and—Jack Dorrien. When one is most happy the sadness of life rushes in like a flood. That is what growing old means.'

But she was thinking of many other things, and particularly of poor Pippin and his song—

'Far, far in fairyland
A fairy I was born——'

CHAPTER XIII

'So these were wed, and merrily rang the bells,
And merrily sped the years.'

THE young pair had been married over a year. Bertram had neither been required nor persuaded to give up his profession. Lord Hilton had returned to England only for a flying visit, but he was expected home for a long time in the autumn. How often he had been expected home in the autumn, Grace remembered, on one hot August day, when sitting at Mursell's bedside.

'Always in the autumn, Mursie dear,' she said. 'It is autumn now with me; then it was spring. How one suffers when one is young; and afterwards how different things seem. Life has tired me.'

'Nay, dearie, not life, but sorrow of heart—sore sorrow and grief, it is, that has wearied ye before your time. But the sorrow has passed; the world's care is vain, dearie; all's bright now; ye'll be growing yoong again, Missie darling; and after all, ye'll be a ladyship.'

'I should like to see Hardwin once more,' she continued musingly, 'and fancy it all over again. That morning in the linden-walk; dear Grannie and Pippin and Reggie and poor

Amy—I should like to remember them all again. That ride on Diana; the birthday and the ball. And poor Brinson! I was hard on him. I trust he is at peace.'

Maurice looked in at the Old House in the afternoon, and found his dear lady under the walnut-tree shade. Margery was spending an afternoon at the Grange; she would come in on her way home. 'The boy,' that unparallelled gem of infancy, was, of course, with her. Grace could look forward to the priceless privilege of seeing him before night.

'He really isn't altogether a bad little chap,' Maurice said, with the gravity of slowly reasoned conviction just attained, 'is he?'

'Considering all things,' she corroborated. 'Never was his equal at squalling.'

'*And* kicking,' the proud father added. 'Trust him to make his way in the world, young rascal.'

'Dear Maurice, I love you most when you make the biggest fool of yourself over that wretched infant,' she said with a tender smile. 'Poor dear, your emotions were so starved and crushed in your bleak, wintry childhood and youth.'

'No doubt I am an infernal ass, darling. But the creature is absolutely and entirely mine and Margery's. I never had any belongings before at all, not even a cat or a dog. And I'm a soft-hearted chap. Margery says it's one of my most engaging vices. Look at the gold in the leaves. Fairy-tales always flutter about those leaves. I should like that brat of ours to hear fairy-tales under the same green roof. How many fairy-tales. But the fairiest of all was acted here. Oh! that day when I found her and Mossy Besson having tea with you. And that day when she waited—jealous little thing—while I sang *Ave Maria*. The day when we said good-bye. It took two hours to say it; she cried, the leaves rustled, and the sunshine faded. And the talks with you, dear, and the music. And the scoldings you gave me. The day I brought the boy. Those first days after the honeymoon. A fairy-haunted place!'

'I too have had much happiness here,' Grace added. 'Dear mother was more restful here than elsewhere. Even in early days, when things seemed so dark, there was much happiness. Those first walnuts I gathered for Mursie; the dawns and dews; little Laurie, brighter and better and sitting out with us; Miss Attwood and Miss Tattwood—I showed you their graves; pleasant chats with Wotton, and Chip, and Captain Besson. And you, dearest, when you came, what sunshine! And sweet Margie; and now the babe. But you before all, Maurice. I

love the Old House. I should not like it to be altered or changed. My spirit surely will cling about it when I am gone. But that is——' She fell into a reverie. Maurice, looking earnestly at her face, that was in profile to him, knew that his bodily presence was forgotten, and saw that the pallor he had observed on coming in had greatly increased, also that her movements, usually so alert and well balanced, were languid, and her posture reclining. 'Was she unwell, or only oppressed by the heat?' he asked. 'Should he fetch her tea, or fruit, or wine? Of course he would; he wanted something himself.'

It was pleasant to be waited on and petted, to have cushions brought and arranged, and to recall the flitting to and fro and service of a seven years' boy, and a younger man with the same eyes and heart.

'Maurice,' she said presently, 'would you not like to be a rich man, a large landowner, and found a family, and all that, for the boy's sake?'

'But I *am* rich,' he replied, with the utmost simplicity; 'and how could I practise if I were a large landowner and all that? And as for Dorrien, I don't want the rascal to be too well off; family pride with the bar sinister seems out of place. Certainly he is a peer's grandson, but of a new peerage, and by the spindle side. He must make his own way.'

She asked him to think of it as a possibility, and remember what impossibilities had already occurred in that enchanted place. But he held to his first opinion.

'And now, Maurice,' she said, 'I want you to trust me, and to forgive me for anything that may seem hereafter lack of confidence in you.'

He covered his face with his hands.

'You are ill,' he faltered presently in a faint voice.

She admitted it. 'But I may live for years,' she added.

A long silence followed. 'Lord Hilton will be in England on Monday,' she said presently, giving him a telegram to that effect. He knew what it meant; he had long known what his father-in-law had been to her, knew that a correspondence had begun between them about the time of his marriage, divining well that she had urged and induced Margery's father to give his consent to the match. He was aware, though it was not openly spoken of, that these long-parted lovers were to spend the remainder of their lives together. A year ago Mark Hilton had been on the point of sailing for England, when, an outbreak upon the Indian frontier calling for prompt imperial chastise-

ment, he had been sent with a too small force to subdue the hostile tribes. This had taken longer than authorities calculated; and, upon its successful termination, troubles in Africa demanded precisely such qualities as Hilton of Khayala was known to possess. That business ended, prolonged fatigue, mental strain and hardship, in bad climates resulted in illness, from which he was now recovering in a Swiss mountain village. He was to have arrived in England in September; it was now mid-August, and he had been telegraphed for. Maurice knew what that meant.

It soon became known that Miss Dorrien was ill. She did not keep her bed, but appeared to be languid and suffering, nothing more. Illness had rarely touched her, never since childhood; her life had been active; its sudden passiveness was startling. Mrs. Saunders whispered it to Chip, Chip to Barnes, Mrs. Chip to the village. Old Mr. Cartmel was daily at the Old House, bringing Ralph or Jim with him. Maurice was there more than once a day. Friends of all ages and degrees clustered from morning till night about the back-door, noiseless and concerned, asking news and noiselessly going away; leaving gifts to express sympathy. One brought a jar of honey, one fruit, another bunches of lavender, many infallible remedies for every known malady. The number and variety of friends was surprising, not only from Barling, but from sequestered hamlets and cottages for miles round. She had listened to their sorrows and given sympathy and advice, of material aid little.

She lay still in unutterable peace all day long; singing in her heart a perpetual joyous refrain, 'He is coming; he is coming; at last, at last!'

How slowly the clock ticked out the languid minutes of that expectant Sunday, how deliberately it paused to whirr out its warning before the slow and solemn strokes that told the sunny hours. Illness was most repugnant to her; she had almost a man's impatience of it; physical pain had never been her portion; age seemed intolerable; she had patience for all but these two ills. Death had been a spectral horror to her bright, warm-blooded youth and rich vitality. 'The last enemy' she had truly felt it, even in the dark days of later life. Action and life, in floods and torrents, she craved and exulted in; plunge of breakers upon rock and shore; boom of in-rushing rollers, toppling before they surged in upon rising tides; roar of tempests, raging of fierce winds—these wilder aspects of nature accorded best with the strong throbbing of her pulses;

the one dread thing was extinction, or the virtual extinction of inaction. The hope of immortality was not enough to conquer this instinctive horror of dissolution, until these last days, when all that dread fell away, and death appeared smiling and genial as an expected friend met upon the road home, and passing away from life's earthly phase seemed sweet and natural as the unclosing of rose-petals. Things move; nothing is still; so she told Maurice on Sunday evening, with many other things that he liked to remember afterwards. Not that death, even now, occupied more than a fleeting moment in her thoughts.

Exquisite night, long, wakeful, happy, with sweet anticipation of blissful morning; never had she passed a night so sweet in the Old House; it was like Maurice's childish nights there, when the clock's slow ticking had been as the blissful echo to his own rapturous heart-throbs, and it had not been possible to sleep for pure joy of heart. 'Coming, coming,' the steady tick-tock said to her. 'At last, at last!' Mark's latest letter was under her pillow; she had the words by heart, but liked the assurance of its reality. She knew exactly where he was, at each stage of his journey by land or by sea; she was prepared by portraits for the marks of over thirty years on the loved face.

Margery was stationed at the window on that glad Monday when the time drew near, to watch and report, like Sister Anne on the tower; it was the window of Mrs. Dorrien's daily, fruitless watches there for the faces that were to appear no more.

'*At last!*'

Margery rose and proclaimed him in sight; approaching wheels became audible; Grace, reclining on the sofa with her face towards the doorway, in which she had so often pictured the apparition of that erect figure, turned white and sick; her head drooped helpless to one side. Maurice, watching her, put a restorative to her lips with a trembling hand; the soft shining eyes opened again, the colour returned. Margery had left the room, and stood at the street door, where a carriage stopped; they heard some one spring out; Grace asked Maurice to raise her to a sitting posture. She was quite calm now; yet the quick, firm tread of a man's step through the house and hall, and up the sounding oak stairs, seemed interminably protracted before the great English captain's strong figure filled the doorway, and the thirty years' waiting and hoping and longing were at an end for ever.

The first flash of the dark eyes recognised the face of the young lover with the haloed hair, in that tall soldierly man with

grey hair, spare frame, level glance, and commanding presence, while his keen blue eyes, softening as they gazed, at once knew in the splendidly moulded form, radiant face, and dark eyes, in whose depths an eternity of purest passion glowed, the sweet bloom, the slender grace, the innocent candour, of the lovely girl who had been his youth's desire and his life's romance.

The deep man's voice chimed with the woman's pure round notes; Grace knew that Mark, the real living Mark, and no other, stood there. He saw the outstretched hands, the unutterable love of a life in the rapidly paling face; a sunbeam piercing a cloud shot through the open window, burnt on a filigree cross of gold visible at her throat, where the dress had been unfastened for ease of breathing, flamed in the jewels of the gold treasure cup and died in the harp-strings, one of which snapped with a dull wail: but, though he paused no moment, though his step was rapid across the room, he was but just in time to see the lustrous eyes darken, their light absorbed in his, and to receive the last happy sigh of the passing soul, as Maurice resigned the lifeless form to the arms of this long-expected lover.

'What if heaven be that, fair and strong,
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?'

EPILOGUE

On one of those clouded autumnal days when everything seems unreal, they laid her to rest. The dark sea spread illimitably to the sky, where horizon fled beyond horizon, as isles of light gleamed out and faded, farther and ever farther from shore. All winds were still; breathless woods seemed to dream of things that could never be spoken; clouds hung in majestic shapes amid splendour of interspaced gold; glamour of purple haze lay upon hill and dale and half-harvested field; now and then ruddy sunbursts drew unexpected colour from shining corn-field, dark woodland and village roof, else all was solemn in gorgeous gloom. Every house in Barling street had close-drawn blinds, a subdued hum in the quiet place proclaimed it fuller than people could remember it. The simple bier, covered by a plain lilac pall, was borne by six friends, amongst whom were Chip and Barnes. Three mourners followed; Lord Wotton, the nearest relation, Lord Hilton, and, dazed with grief and scarcely conscious, Maurice Bertram.

But all Barling, old Mr. Cartmel and both his sons, Captain Besson and people of various degrees for miles round, flocked in and followed. Also strangers, whom Barling people afterwards knew to be Mr. Dolliver and Mr. Bradley, other solicitors, representative of the Harbordtown firm, the steward of the Hardwin estates, stewards of other estates, representatives of mining officials, deputations from philanthropic societies, the physician of St. Ann's Homes, many clergymen, notably the incumbent of the beautiful new church at Sandyknowe, which was now known to have been the gift of Grace Dorrien. Masses of flowers and floral devices, from tenantry on various estates, from the servants at Hardwin, from asylums and institutions, besides an infinite number from cottagers and other neighbours, poured in and embarrassed those who arranged this home-going from the Old House. The fine peal of bells lately hung in Barling tower rang muffled in honour of their giver; the new organ boomed and lamented above her silent presence.

After they had left her in her plain, earth bed by her mother's side, people stood about, and met in each other's houses, talking quietly over the great wealth and splendid munificence of her whose charity and industry and self-denying life they had long known and prized. In the fulness of hearts, strange tales were related of troubles told and sympathy and counsel given at the Old House, one tale calling forth another and yet another.

An obituary notice, of which Mr. Dolliver had the secret, appeared the day after the death, and soon ran through the press, so that it speedily became known that the Grace Harbord Dorrien, who had just yielded her breath in the Old House at Barling, was the owner of the great Harbord property, the anonymous giver of many splendid things, and supporter of many noble charities. Then Mr. Cartmel divined the source of his own little fortune, and Chip knew who gave him his pony.

But Maurice Bertram was too much overcome by grief to think of those things; the great uninvited concourse of people at the burial seemed to him but a part of the strangeness of a ruined world.

The Old House emptied of its treasure; how impossible, how ghostly it seemed, when he returned to it, wondering why he returned. Trees and flowers, walls and windows, all seemed asking mutely for the lost presence that had lent them life and charm. A house so vacated has the solemn pathos of the newly dead body, still so eloquent of its late tenant.

Something was said about a will, when the mourners were again beneath that loved roof, whereat he turned away, as from sacrilege, and went into the garden, instinctively seeking the walnut-trees, which to-day had no rustling of fairy tales in their boughs, but stood mute and statue still, like guards by a royal bier.

Here he sat, as only a week ago with her, and all his grief and love gathered and surged up, as in great storms the whole sea seems to gather in one vast, billowy wall, and crushed heavily upon him, soul and body, crushing and tearing and sweeping all away in one confused roar of surf and shingle. Bending forward, his face in his hands, his arms on his knees, he groaned through set teeth in travail of soul, and shuddered in bodily pangs, with loosening joints and cramped sinews. All sweet memories of that joy-haunted spot were so many wrenching pangs of anguish in the fresh poignancy of this half-realised loss.

It seemed a long time, and then he felt a strong hand laid firmly on his shoulder, and looked up into the face of Mark Hilton.

'Come, Maurice,' he said, 'rouse yourself; play the man. You have given way long enough.'

Maurice looked up with mute pain in his dry, dimmed eyes, his mouth still quivering and his teeth set hard, to meet a commanding but kind gaze; and a gush of love and trust sprang up in his heart.

'Death often unites more closely than life,' Mark Hilton said; 'the bar of flesh broken, souls draw nearer together.'

'There was no one like her. You don't *know* what she was,' he sighed.

'I was not so lucky. From the hour when first I saw her, a lovely and fascinating girl, she has been more than all the world to me; never a day without thought of her—till we meet again,' he added in another tone.

Maurice, still gazing, half-awed by the still flame in the eyes and strong thrill in the voice, saw in the erect, well-carried figure that stood before him, full of latent strength and alive in every fibre, a renowned soldier, the weapon of a mighty empire, a national idol, a popular hero, adorned with hard-won honours, titles, and successes, and *Grace Dorrien's lover and beloved.* He remembered all her kindness, her love and companionship to himself with gratitude, wonder, and love unutterable.

'You were very dear to her,' Mark Hilton added.

When they came to the door beneath the sundial, Mark Hilton turned, again laid his hand on Bertram's shoulder, and said in a softened, moved voice—

'You were *very* dear to her. You made the happiness of her later life.'

Bertram wrung the offered hand, and went in with new-born joy in his heart. He was nearer than ever to her now. And yet he wondered that Mark Hilton could bear the snatching away of the proffered cup; Mark wondered even more.

They found Mr. Dolliver seated in the hall with Margery and Lord Wotton, a large parchment roll was on the table before him.

'It is a long will,' he said, 'one of the longest we ever drew up. I do not, therefore, propose to read it. A copy that you may peruse at leisure is here before me, at your service. The circumstances are unusual; it has occurred to me that it would be well, while we are together, to give some idea of the disposition of Miss Dorrien's property informally, without loss of time. You are attached to the Old House, Dr. Bertram. You will not regret that it, with everything it contains, except certain parcels and papers specified, is bequeathed to you.'

'What?' cried Bertram. 'Mr. Dolliver, you surely mistake. This house is Lord Wotton's property.'

'Was,' the latter corrected. 'There is no entail; I gave it to my cousin knowing it was to pass to you.'

'Also,' continued Mr. Dolliver, 'the adjacent farm, known as the Old House Farm, with all stock, crops, etc., also share in the mines, also her place by Mursell. Lord Wotton is already aware that Hardwin Hall and its lands and half the Harbordtown property come to him. St. Aubyn's, and the extensive lands adjoining it, with half the other moiety of the Harbordtown property, and Sir Geoffrey Harbord's house in Eaton Place, go to Lord Hilton.'

'Surely, Mr. Dolliver, you are in error,' cried Lord Hilton, starting up in amazement. 'I knew that Miss Dorrien at her mother's death had inherited property that she did not care to enjoy, and that she proposed settling upon my son-in-law, Dr. Bertram, but——'

'Her property is magnificent. She was probably the greatest heiress in the three kingdoms,' Mr. Dolliver replied, dwelling upon words expressive of wealth with melancholy enjoyment. 'The burden of her colossal fortune oppressed her, almost crushed her. Dear Miss Dorrien has often spoken of her immense responsibilities. I knew her as a little child. She was the most unworldly, the most——' The old man's voice failed him, he concealed his emotion in a fit of coughing. 'Mrs. Bertram,' he said, turning to Margery, 'receives certain jewels, valueless personal things, and fifteen thousand pounds.'

Margery was greatly touched; the valueless personal things, the Old House and Mursell, were the most precious of all Grace's treasures. Mr. Dolliver, observing that the remainder of the property was portioned out in legacies to many friends, including Captain Besson, and innumerable bequests to hospitals and other institutions, and that a small estate went to Raymond Garenne, took his leave.

The others clung to the Old House, as if held by the spell of the vanished presence. Each told the other something fresh of her who drew them together. Bertram spoke least. He was touched and gladdened beyond measure, both by his dear lady's kindness in this priceless bequest of the home so marked by her mind and heart, and the delight of having it and the right to renew her memory with Mursell. Wotton related the circumstances of Grace Dorrien's unexpected inheritance; her bitter grief that her mother could never enjoy the wealth to which she

was born; the severe poverty in which the mother and daughter lived during those long years, and their silence upon the subject. Later on, Mark Hilton knew the history, as no one else could, through her diary, bequeathed to him together with his own letters and the packet of cuttings that traced his promotions and honours from a simple captain of engineers till now.

'I shall change nothing,' Maurice said. 'I would rather have the Old House, with its silent witness to her life and thoughts and all its associations with her, than the whole world and all the glory of it besides.'

Whenever Maurice and Margery and Mark Hilton—who knew every room in the house and every place about it by description long and long ago—went to the Old House, they renewed their youth and love and held silent converse with the brave and loving and joyous spirit of her who for so many years had suffered and struggled, endured and conquered, and made it a sweet home and centre of love, comfort, and charm.

And if life became difficult and duty harsh, to three people it was always stimulating—yet calming—to climb the garden slope to the down, and listen to the breeze in the beech boughs, whether it wailed winter in shivering red leaves, or sang summer in fresh green.

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